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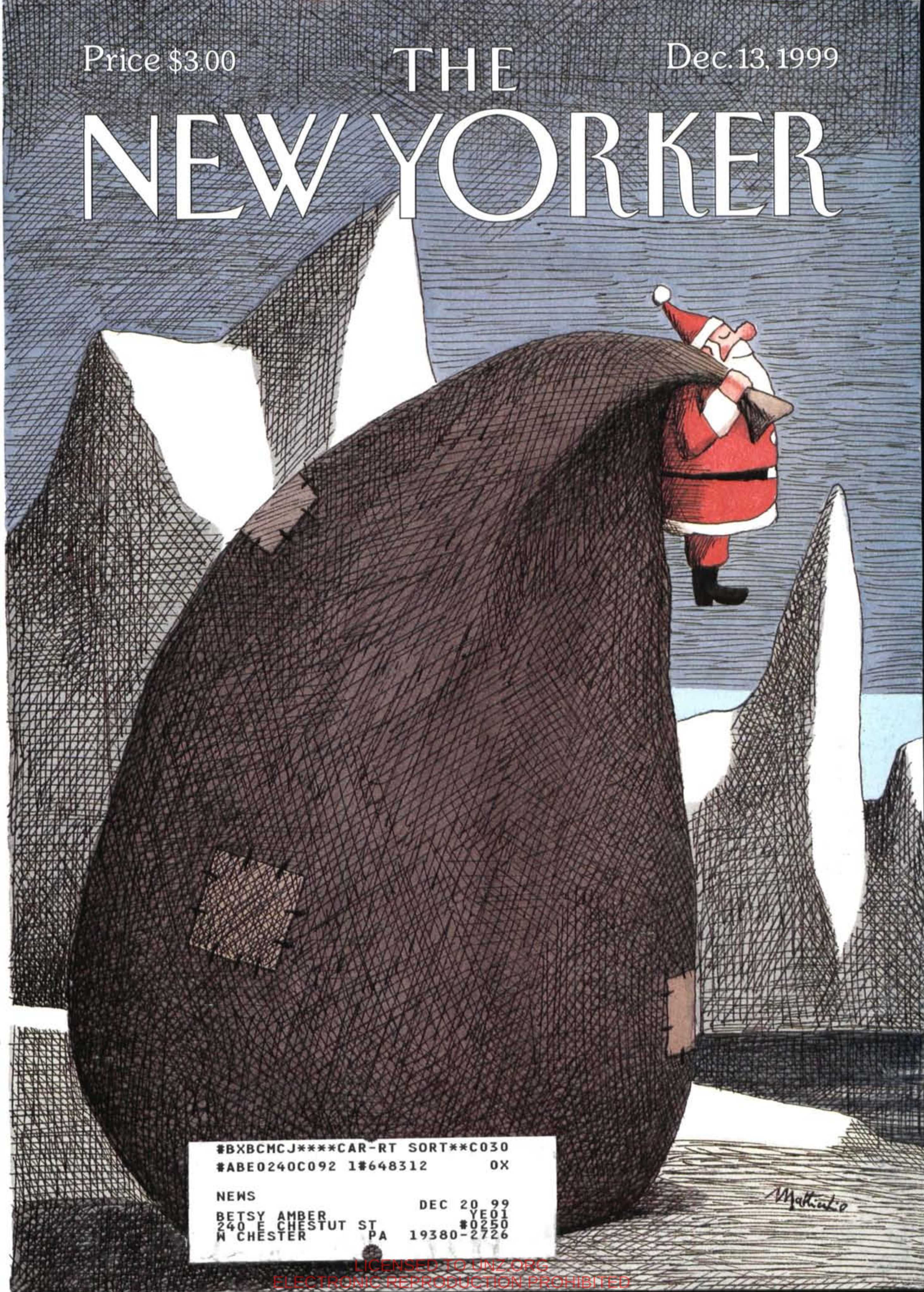

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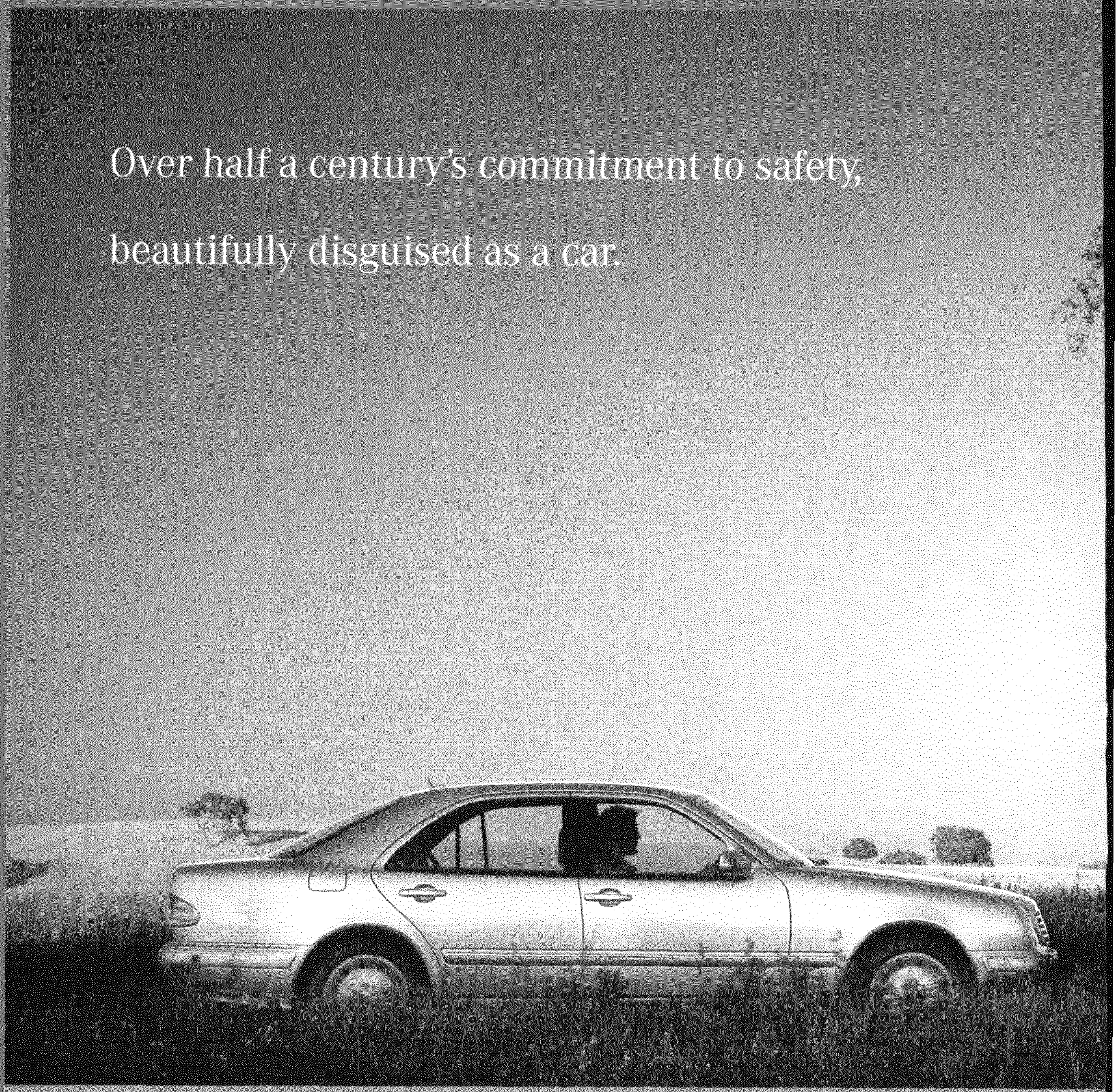
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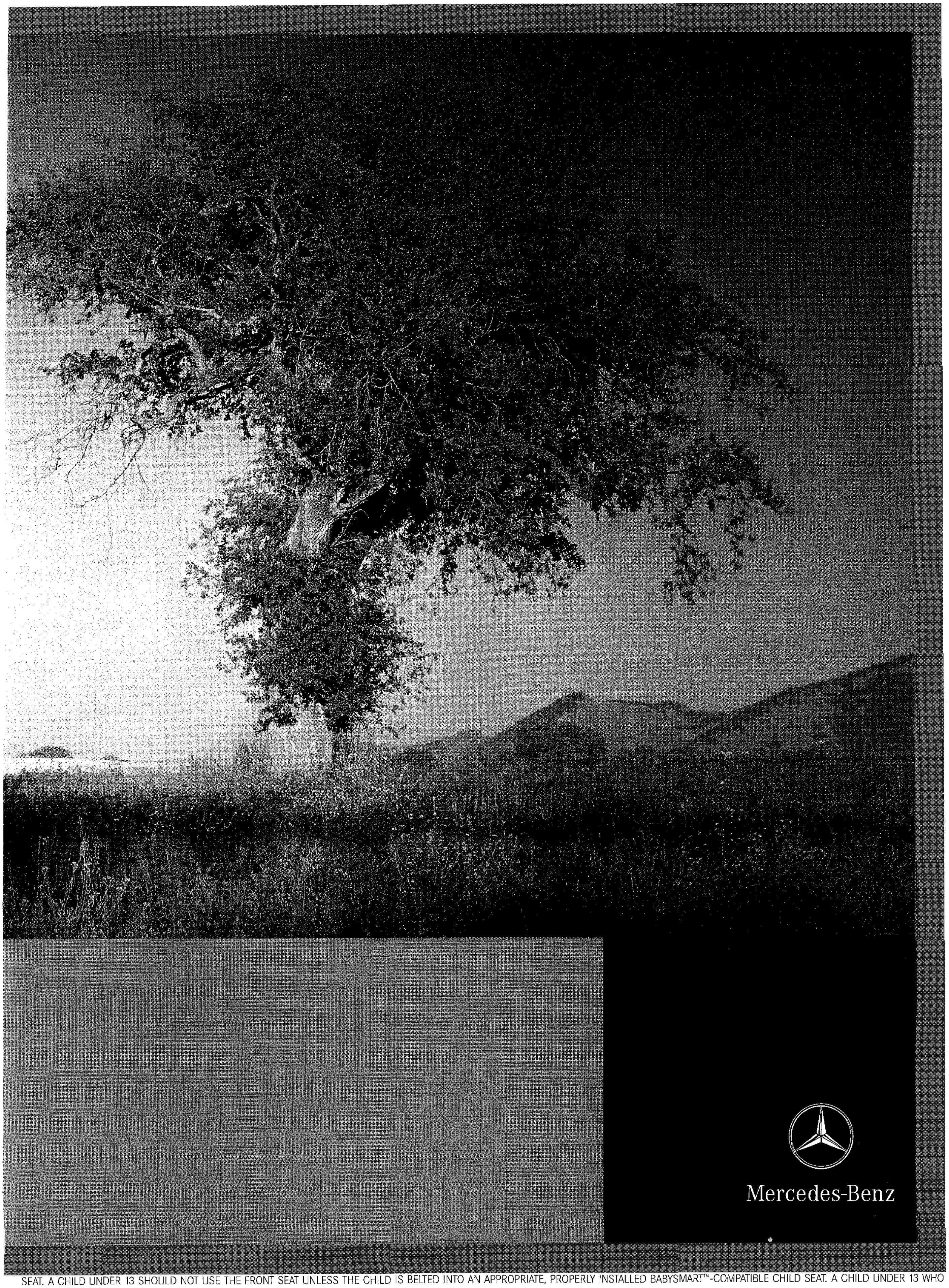

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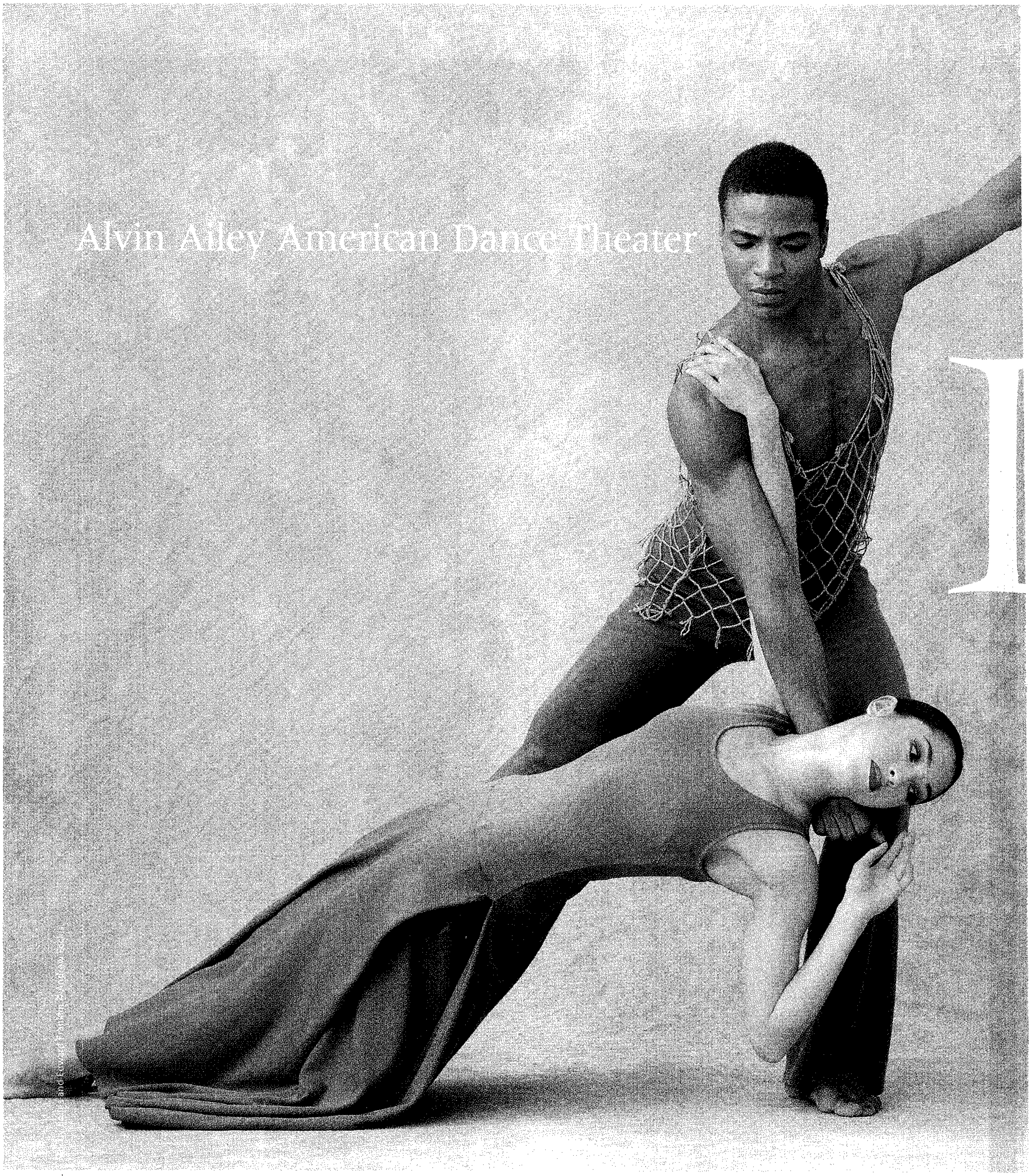

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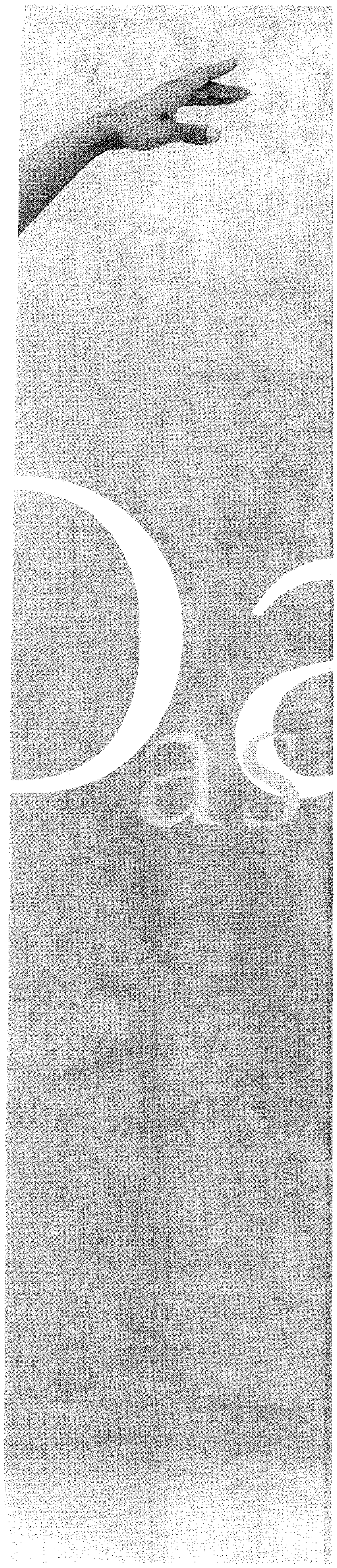

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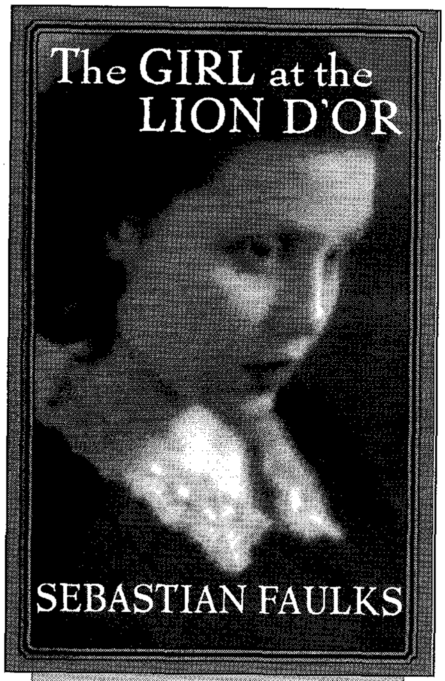
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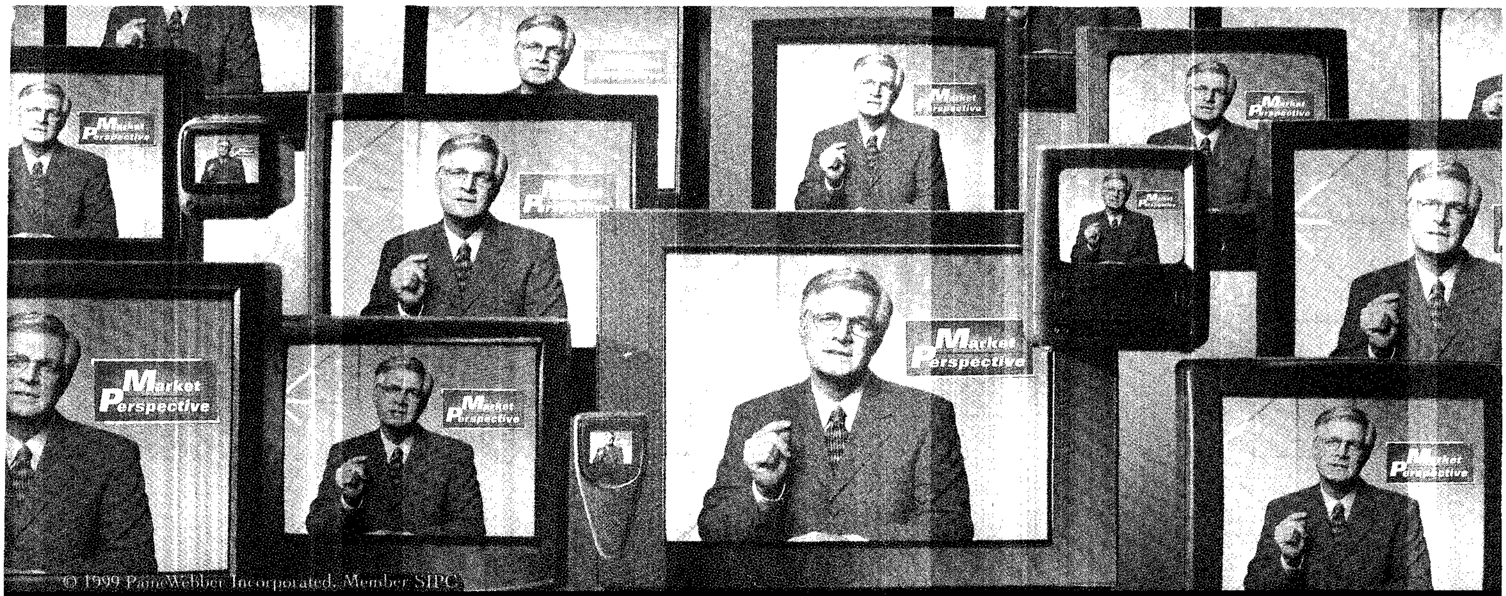

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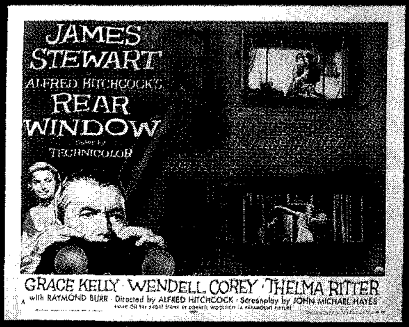
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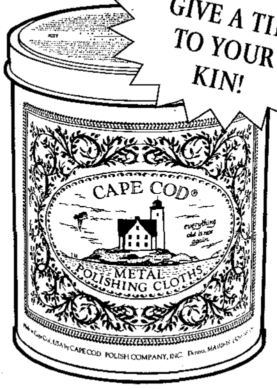

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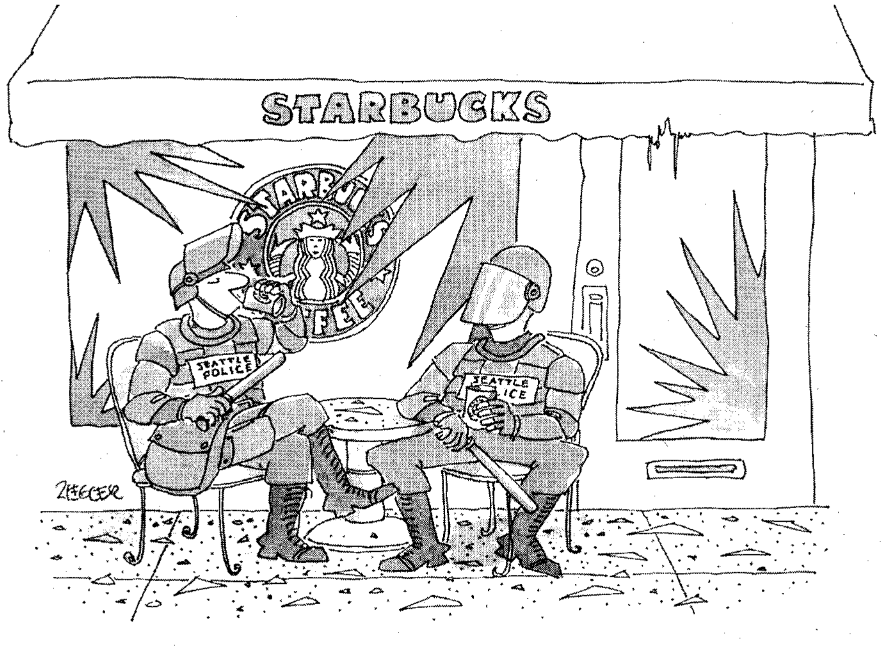

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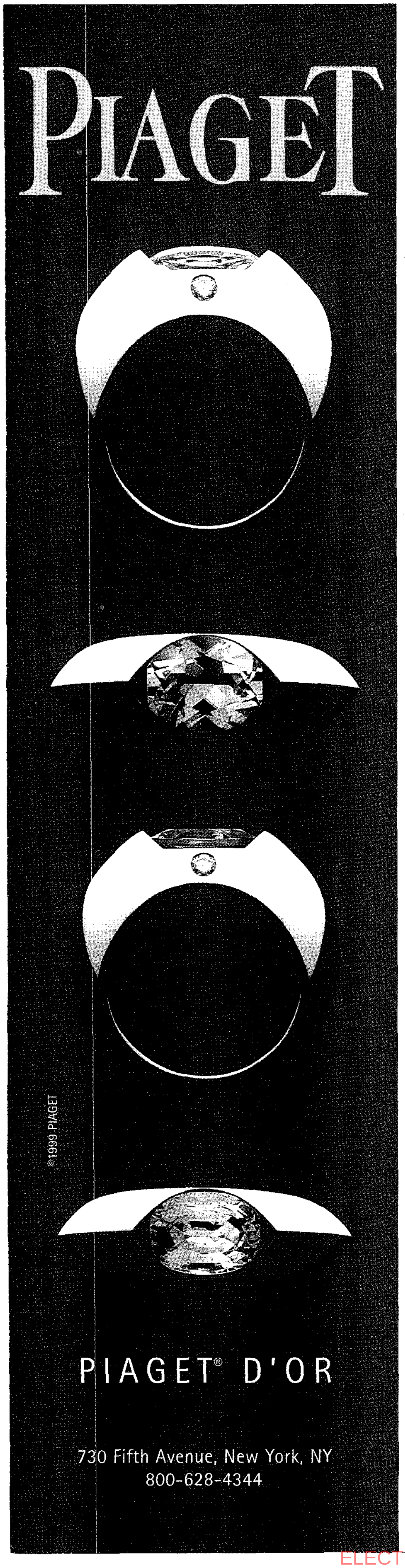
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WHO'S WINNING THE WEST?

Nicholas Lemann, in "No People Allowed" (Our Far-Flung Correspondents, November 22nd), implies that the enviromental activist Kierán Suckling is on the margin of sanity because he wants to end logging, grazing, and suburban development in the desert Southwest no matter the thousands of jobs it will cost. To the extent that Lemann gets away with painting Suckling as an extremist, it is because he omits the extreme problems motivating Suckling. To wit: The U.S. Forest Service, an agency that until recently had never seen a clear-cut it did not like, not only allows but encourages the destruction of public land by heavily subsidizing slash-and-run operations, letting marketeers make off with the profits, and sticking taxpayers with the environmental cleanup. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management manages ranch lands in a similar fashion. As for suburban development, better known as sprawl, all manner of government subsidies, from cheap roads to home-mortgage deductions, enable city fleers to chew up thrice the land per capita used by urbanites and to drive four-ton, polluting suburban assault vehicles while leaving to city dwellers, who are generally poorer, a disproportionately high share of taxes, smog, and traffic, and greatly reduced open space. Lemann calls Suckling "radical," but the word better describes the reaction of antigovernment loggers, ranchers, or soccer dads to suggestions that they pay anything close to market rate for the land and infrastructure on which they depend.

STEPHEN HENDRICKS
Helena, Mt.

The New Yorker's coverage of environmental activism is rare enough to qualify for endangered-species listing without delay. But, though Nicholas Lemann made the process by which endangered plants and animals receive federal listing appear relatively straightforward, there is always a delay. Seemingly, listing occurs only when the Fish and Wildlife Service realizes that it is about to be sued. And if a case goes to court the process is so lengthy and expensive that an endangered species may well become extinct before the case is resolved. Because Lemann perceives Kierán Suckling to be abusing these listings, he labels him an outlaw. He is not. He is the ultimate law enforcer, heeding the laws of nature.

NAOMI RACHEL
Boulder, Colo.

ROCKWELL SPEAKS

The critical and commercial juggernaut carrying the remains of Norman Rockwell to canonization as a great American master should be stopped (The Art World, "Fanfares for the Common Man," by Peter Schjeldahl, November 22nd). It should never have started. Credit the art-historical perspective of Rockwell himself (he was no fool): "illustrator" was the word he always used. Trust his assessment of his vision of an idealized America, from the perspective of 1964: "I liked it, but now I'm sick of it." Schjeldahl writes that Rockwell "painted beautifully." Far from it: Rockwell was a skillful draftsman who belongs in the excellent company of other commercial illustrators, such as Maxfield Parrish. Like the boy who has just unmasked Santa Claus's secret identity in Rockwell's 1956 painting "The Discovery," I stand agape at some critics' specious comparisons between Rockwell and Old Masters like Vermeer.

JAMES THOMPSON
Cullowhee, N.C.

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE: The ballot for the first annual *New Yorker* Book Awards can be found between pages 20 and 21.

•

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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Adam Baum and the Jew Movie—Ron Leibman stars as a Jewish movie mogul, who hires a Gentile (Christopher Evan Welch) to write a film about anti-Semitism, in a comedy by Daniel Goldfarb. In previews through Dec. 11. Opens Dec. 12 at 7. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

Amadeus—From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Another American: Asking & Telling—A one-man show written and performed by Marc Wolf, based on his interviews with gay and straight military personnel from the Second World War to the present. In previews. (Theatre at St. Clements, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

Elsa Edgar—Bob Kingdom portrays both J. Edgar Hoover and Elsa Maxwell, in a play he wrote with Neil Bartlett, which examines the power of public relations. In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

Hamlet—Liev Schreiber portrays the prince, in a Public Theatre staging directed by Andrei Serban. In previews. (425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Home of the Brave—A Jewish Repertory Theatre revival of Arthur Laurents's drama, about anti-Semitism in the military during the Second World War. In previews through Dec. 11. Opens Dec. 12 at 7. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

Hurricane—Erin Cressida Wilson's comedy of manners. In previews through Dec. 10. Opens Dec. 11 at 8. (C.S.C., 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 10.)

Jolson & Co.—The York Theatre Company kicks off the season with a musical about the life of Al Jolson. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

Swing!—A musical salute to the genre, directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. Preview on Dec. 8. Opens Dec. 9 at 8. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

True History and Real Adventures—Michael Mayer directs a play by Sybille Pearson, about a Scottish girl who comes to America in search of Calamity Jane. In previews through Dec. 12. Opens Dec. 13 at 8. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3366.)

Waiting in the Wings—Two elderly actresses and rivals (Lauren Bacall and Rosemary Harris) find themselves in the same retirement home, in Noël Coward's 1960 play. Directed by Michael Langham. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Adobe Theatre Company—This fairy-tale satire (with an unprintably naughty title) is much more fun than it ought to be. Jeff Goode's script is cotton candy—delightful to look at, but insubstantial. Aided by Bernard Grenier's unforgettable costumes, the engaging comic cast would be right at home on any vaudeville stage, and they make the audience forget the play's lack of edge (Vin Knight, as the Storyteller, and Peter Dinklage, as the Handsome Prince, are particularly good). Beware, however: this holiday fare is only for those families who watch "South Park" unbleeped; the Fairy Godphallus, though charming, is the least of it. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

Ancestral Voices—A staged reading, with a rotating cast, of A. R. Gurney's play. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

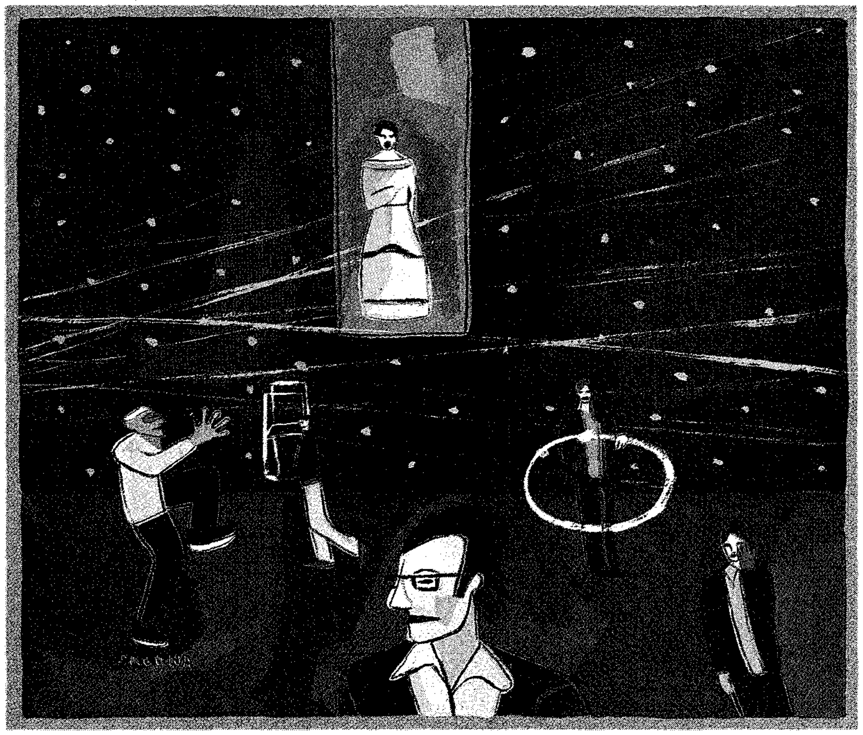
Contact—The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, co-conceived with John Weidman, is a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection, the atmosphere of longing. It's a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/18-25/99.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Country Club—Douglas Carter Beane's satire on the young suburban set is loaded with witty dialogue, and the production is graced by the Drama Dept.'s always good acting and a fine set, but Beane's writing suffers from a peculiar shallowness almost worthy of his characters. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 541-8441. Closes Dec. 18.)

Dame Edna: The Royal Tour—Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. She's also a bit like Tinkerbell, real if the audience believes in her, and it's a testament to the power of the character and of Humphries's performance that she compels instant belief. (11/1/99) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

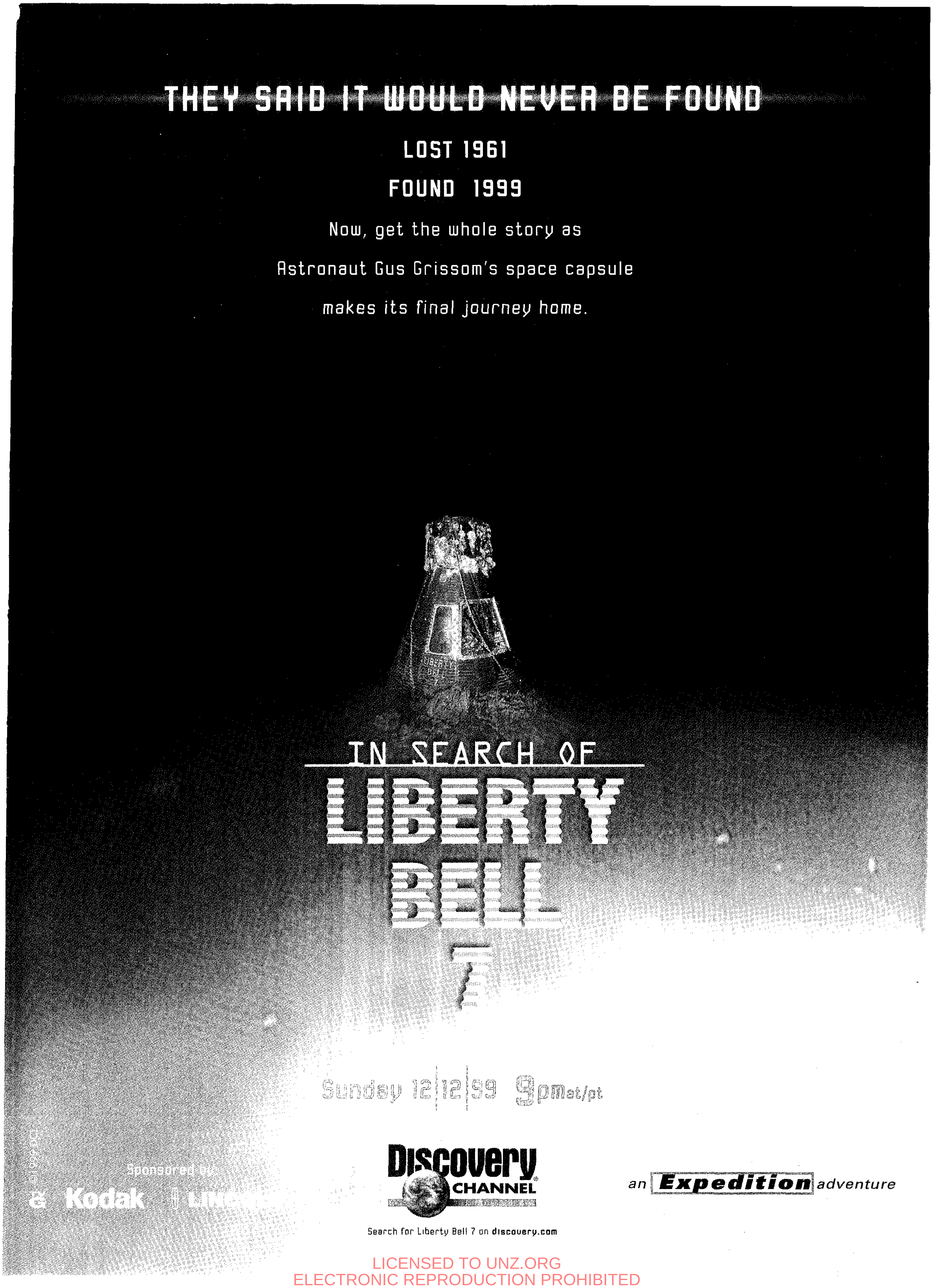
Dinner with Friends—Donald Margulies's new play concerns two upper-middle-class couples who have been married for a dozen or so years; one of them survives the wear and tear of marriage, and the other doesn't. It's an intelligent depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage, and the cast give well-rounded performances. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Eclipsed—In Patricia Burke Brogan's drama, set in the sixties in western Ireland, a group of unwed mothers confined to labor in a "Magdalene laundry" (created by the Catholic Church to keep fallen women away from sin and men) fantasize about Elvis Presley, home-cooked meals, and their children, who have been sent to orphanages. Two nuns watch over them, one a novitiate who is sympathetic to their thwarted longings, the other a hardened Mother Superior who is decidedly not. The history is fascinating, but the play is awkward and gaspingly earnest, and less engaging than the



"Space," a play written and directed by Tina Landau, at the Public.

MARINA SAGONA



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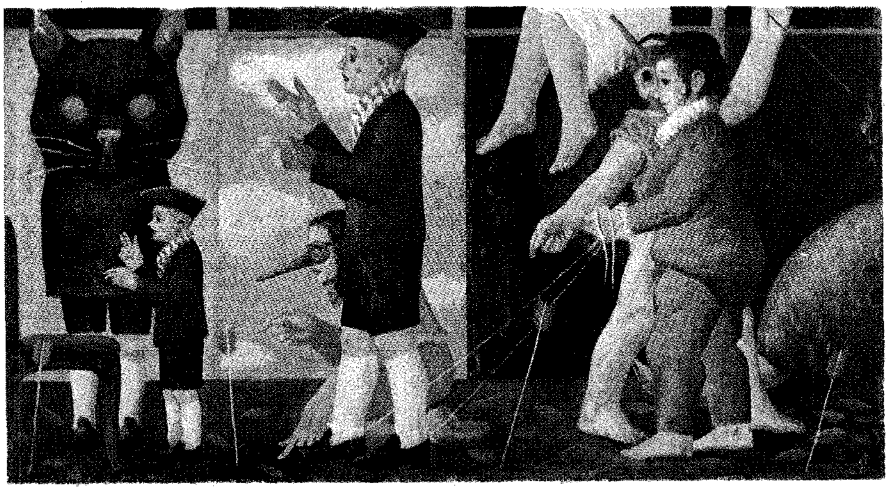
recent news reports on the same subject. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Dec. 19.)

1839—Gale Gates et al.'s new production is a multimedia meditation on the mind of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597.)

Enter the Night—The Signature Theatre Company's Maria Irene Fornes season continues with a 1993 drama. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

Epic Proportions—A spoof of the making of a Biblical movie on location in the Arizona desert during the early thirties; it dramatizes many plagues, but no plague greater than the one that corporate culture has visited on Broadway in the last few years. What's strange in a piece that has no ear for the moment is that it contains the pitch-perfect performance of Kristin Chenoweth, a comedienne of terrific originality and charm. (10/18-25/99) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Exact Center of the Universe—An amiable comedy by Joan Vail Thorne, lightly seasoned with insight, about a classic Southern dragon-lady mother (Frances Sternhagen, in a beautiful performance). (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)



"1839," the latest multimedia play from the company Gale Gates et al.

GERARD DUBOIS

An Experiment with an Air Pump—Shelagh Stevenson's play, which describes a study carried out by its eighteenth-century characters, examines with humor and intelligence the relationships between science and morality, scientific passion and love, knowledge and society's stability. Set both at the end of the eighteenth century and on our own upcoming millennial New Year's Eve, the play smoothly plumbs its engaging characters' fears of the future while puncturing our pompous notion that this New Year is different from all others. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 313 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Dec. 12.)

Fuddy Meers—The very promising playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's kitchen-sink comedy goes so over the top that you might miss the melancholy beneath the absurd chaos. In a cast of characters (played by the best comic ensemble in years) which includes a blissful amnesiac, a maimed criminal with a speech impediment, a protective mother whose stroke has rendered her Caryl Churchill cryptic, and a sweet kook who expresses his anger with a hand puppet, no one is who they seem and everyone is connected in surprising ways, and through surprising needs—the *Über*-dysfunctional family? (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Ghosts—Ibsen's 1881 drama. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 279-4200.)

Give Me Your Answer, Do!—In Brian Friel's latest drama, two Irish friends and novelists, one a commercial failure, the other a best-seller, come together with their wives (and some in-laws and a literary archivist) for a late-summer afternoon of cocktails and angst. The whole thing builds to a vaguely "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" fervor in the second act, but the performances are exhilarating, so you forgive the unnecessarily melodramatic ending. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

If Memory Serves—Elizabeth Ashley is a fading television actress whose son (Sam Trammell) causes a scandal by making his recollections of his childhood public, in a comedy by Jonathan Tolins. Directed by Leonard Foglia. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

In the Blood—Suzan-Lori Parks's new play is based on "The Scarlet Letter." Directed by David Esbjornson. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

The Jazz Singer—The Jewish Repertory Theatre presents a new musical version of the Samson Raphaelson play. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

John Gabriel Borkman—Ibsen's late drama, in a staging by the Pearl Theatre Company. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Dec. 19.)

Kat and the Kings—A rock-and-roll musical set in Cape Town in 1957. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Keep Bangin'—"Stomp" showed that you can cook up an evening of theatre out of percussion alone, but this show proves it better. The ten-man cast is led by Jared Crawford, who, with his million-toothed smile, firestorm of dreads, and rare genius, lifts the whole thing into a kind of art heaven. (Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 254-5076.)

Kiss Me, Kate—Brian Stokes Mitchell and Marin Mazzie star in a revival of the Cole Porter musical, under the direction of Michael Blakemore. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Marie Christine—Michael John LaChiusa's new musical, set in New Orleans in the eighteen-hundreds, starring Audra McDonald. Graciela Daniele is the director. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Maybe Baby, It's You—Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show's accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Shanian and Shari Simpson. There's an undercurrent of sweetness and longing that makes the evening more than a series of skits—it's what you instinctively know at thirty but wish you'd learned at twenty. Directed with a sure, light touch by Jeremy Dobrish. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

Minnelli on Minnelli—Liza sings songs made famous through the movie musicals her father, Vincente, directed. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100.)

Morning, Noon and Night—A day in the life of the eccentric, obsessive monologuist Spalding Gray, removed from his natural habitat (New York City) and transplanted to an old house in Sag Harbor, where he lives in anxiety-tinged bliss with his girlfriend, stepdaughter, and two young sons. A haze of happiness hangs over the whole thing, which makes it seem a bit toothless, but Gray tells a good coming-of-age story, and his self-mocking exaggerations are actually endearing when turned on the domestic universe. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Passion of Frida Kahlo—Priscilla López portrays the Mexican painter, in a renamed restaging of Doris Sendler's drama "Goodbye My Friduchita." (Arclight Theatre, 152 W. 71st St. 307-4100.)

The Price—In Arthur Miller's 1968 play, a failed, dutiful brother, who thinks that life has given him a bad deal, cuts another bad deal, this time with a furniture dealer. But when his successful sibling turns up, the play becomes a negotiation about their family history, an agreement that can't be reached. As the rivalry is played out, the audience watches the riveting spectacle of a man clinging to a self-destructive illusion, despite all evidence to the contrary. As a metaphor for our culture of complaint, it ain't bad. And neither are the performances. "The Price" is not a waste of time, which is saying a lot on Broadway these days. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Putting It Together—A revue celebrating the songs of Stephen Sondheim, starring Carol Burnett. Directed by Eric D. Schaeffer. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Rainmaker—Jayne Atkinson and Woody Harrelson star in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Richard Nash's 1954 drama. Scott Ellis is the director. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

Refuge—Neil Pepe directs a play by Jessica Goldberg, in which a woman is left to care for her feeble brother and troubled sister when her parents move to Florida. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 315-2120.)

Saturday Night Fever—The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Shyster—Fisher Stevens, Annabella Sciorra, and Phyllis Newman are in the cast of a comedy by Bryan Goluboff, staged by Naked Angels. (Blue Heron, 123 E. 24th St. 279-4200. Closes Dec. 19.)

Space—A scientist encounters three people with similar stories about contact with otherworldly beings, in a drama by Tina Landau. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Tango Argentino—The dance revue, in a limited-engagement encore staging. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

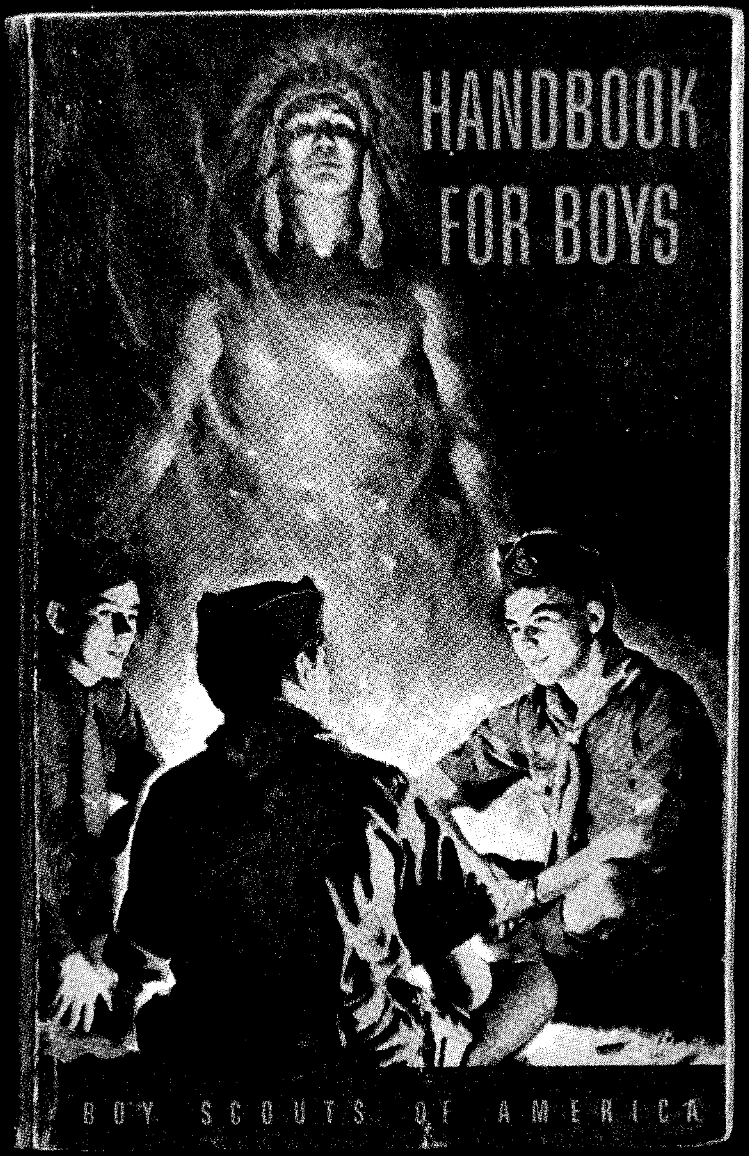
Trudy Blue—In the latest play from Marsha Norman ("'night, Mother"), Polly Draper stars as a successful Manhattan novelist in a moment of crisis. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765.)

Uncle Jack—The director and writer Jeff Cohen's contemporary adaptation of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." He manages, unlike some adaptors, to make an ever-fresh play seem newly accessible without raising the question "Why bother?" It's set on the expansive estate of a rural West Virginia family, and with the regrettable exception of Bernard K. Addison's scenery-chewing performance as the doctor, it's a sweet and rewarding experience. A charmer. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 604-4195.)

The Vagina Monologues—Eve Ensler's one-woman show is based on interviews she conducted with two hundred women about their vaginas: the body part itself, the word, and why "it never sounds like a word you want to say" no matter how many times you say it. There's a certain amount of shtick involved, but most of the stories she tells are touching and memorable. Often sadly so: Ensler makes you realize that when it comes to treating women and their bodies with real respect, the world still has miles to go. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Y2K—James Naughton and Patricia Kalember portray an affluent New York couple whose lives are turned upside down by a computer

July 10, 1955. Forced to use for kindling while earning merit badge.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hacker, in a drama by Arthur Kopit. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200).

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/ TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FOOTLOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOSSE:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T SAY PAST MIDNIGHT:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—With its annual "Nutcracker" enchantment (be it live or Memorex), the company returns to the business of inspiring little girls in pigtails to dream of a life *en pointe.* (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Dec. 7-9 and Dec. 14 at 6, Dec. 10 at 8, Dec. 11 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 12 at 1 and 5.)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre—Dec. 8 at 8: "Lettres d'Amour," "Danger Run," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 9 at 8: "Lettres d'Amour," "Echo: Far from Home," and "The Prodigal Prince." . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 8: "Lettres d'Amour," "Fever Swamp," "Cry," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 11 at 2: "Divining," "Echo: Far from Home," and "Hymn." . . . ¶ Dec. 11 at 8: "C-Sharp Street, B-Flat Avenue," "Danger Run," and "The Prodigal Prince." . . . ¶ Dec. 12 at 3: "Polish Pieces," "Cry," "C-Sharp Street, B-Flat Avenue," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 12 at 7:30: "Fever Swamp," "Cry," "Echo: Far from Home," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 14 at 8: "The Prodigal Prince," "After Eden," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Jan. 2.)

"Love Songs"—For a saga about the forbidden love of two slaves, David Roussève and his nine-member company swell their numbers with trained and untrained performers from the greater Brooklyn community. Roussève intercuts the romantic tragedy, set to a selection of arias, with sardonic segments about contemporary romance. The choreographer, in a variety of guises, narrates each section, ranging in style from melodrama to satire to surrealism, including one section in which the fleeing couple are chased by ten-foot-tall hounds of hell, courtesy of Jim Henson's puppets. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 8-11 at 7:30.)

Ballet Hispanico—The Upper West Side Company, under the direction of Tina Ramirez, continues its mixture of adventurous new work (this season features premières from David Roussève, Pedro Ruiz, and Regina Miranda) and strong repertory pieces culled from earlier commissions. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 7-10 at 8, Dec. 11 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 12 at 2 and 7:30.)

"I Mutantes Seras"—The Brazilian choreographic duo of Roseanne Chamecki and Andrea Lerner offer a work about metamorphosis, in which, among other effects, the longtime dance partners at times appear to be parts of the same body. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Dec. 9-12 at 8.)

"Autobiography of a Liar"—David Gordon and the Pick Up Performance Company end the Silver Series celebrations that have marked Danspace Project's twenty-fifth year with a choreographic retrospective of new and old works. Gordon calls the effort, which includes segments of pieces from 1975 to 1999, an "event full of half-remembered half-truths about dances made another time in another life accommodating the talents of performers I was in love with and remade for the talents of performers I hope to be in love with now." (Danspace Project, St. Marks In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Dec. 9-12 at 8:30. Through Dec. 19.)

"Requiem for the 20th Century"—The ninety-three-year-old Butoh master Kazuo Ohno and his sixty-one-year-old son, Yoshito. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 832-1155. Dec. 9-11 at 8.)

"I Saw Me When We Were Dancing"—In her choreographic début, the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane dancer Toshiko Oiwa presents an evening-length quartet, set to a variety of music, including folk, Gypsy, Zen prayers, and fretless-electric-guitar solos. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Dec. 9-12 at 8:30.)

NIGHT LIFE

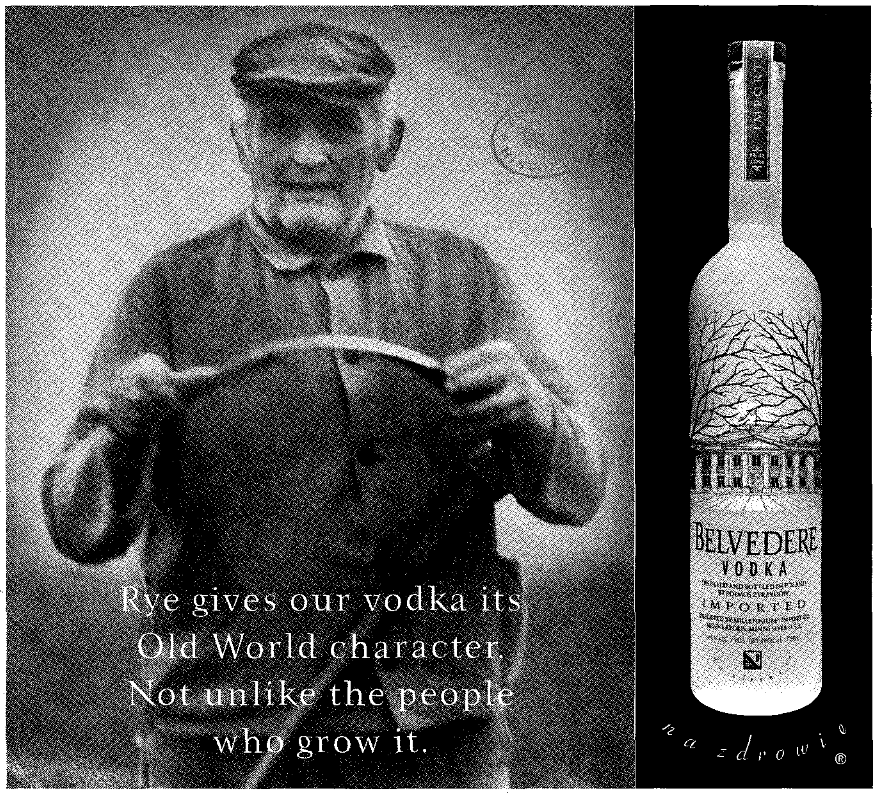
CONCERTS

"Paul Winter's 20th Anniversary Winter Solstice Celebration"—Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart joins Winter, his consort, vocalist Arto Tuncboyaciyan, and a host of other musicians and dancers. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 662-2133. Dec. 9-10 at 7:30 and Dec. 11 at 2 and 7:30.)

Jazz at Lincoln Center—Duke Ellington considered his sacred music the most important works in his œuvre. The infrequently heard late-period compositions will be presented by Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra with the legendary gospel singer Shirley Caesar. For these performances the ensemble will be led by Eric Reed, Marsalis's former pianist, whose gospel background is an integral aspect of his playing. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Dec. 9-10 at 8, Dec. 11 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 12 at 3.)

"Pianos for Duke"—What better way to salute the quirky, utterly individual piano approach of Duke Ellington than by having three of the most distinctive pianists of our day—Randy Weston, John Hicks, and Jason Moran—play his music? (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7100. Dec. 11 at 8.)

David Krakauer and Klezmer Madness!—The virtuoso clarinettist Krakauer can play it straight or play it twisted; either way, his exceptional command and his clever klezmer subversion are worth checking out. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Dec. 11 at 8.)



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Sidney Bechet Society—Reedman Dan Block, trumpeter Peter Ecklund, trombonist Joel Helleny, pianist Keith Ingham, drummer Eddie Locke, and bassist Murray Wall gather for a concert in honor of the great saxophonist. (Theater at Greenwich Village Center, 219 Sullivan St. For more information, call 516-627-4468. Dec. 13 at 6:15 and 8:30.)

CLUBS

(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bam Café, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Dec. 9: Former Mekons guitarist **Jon Langford** (see Maxwell's) stops by for an acoustic set, accompanied by **John Rice** on mandolin and Dobro.

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 8: **Boss Hog,** fronted by the wife-and-husband duo Cristina Martinez and John Spencer (best known for his own band, the Blues Explosion), barrels through its own brand of mutated blues. Dec. 9: **Marshall Crenshaw,** the onetime great pretender of power pop, touring in support of his new album, "447," which happens to be his best release in years. Dec. 10: **Arto Lindsay's** ongoing hybrid project—crossing his downtown noise-jazz roots with the rhythms of Brazil—has lately taken an even more adventurous turn, as if he'd switched from recording on Ipanema Beach to rush hour in downtown Rio. On his latest release, "Prize," he's turned up both the drum and bass and his trademark skronk guitar, and he's allowed his placid bossa-nova experiments to unravel into the bumptious racket of full-blown samba. Dec. 11: **John Linnell,** one half of They Might Be Giants, presents his latest project, a collection of songs inspired by the fifty states of our republic.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dec. 11: The sharp, scratchy guitar of veteran **Hubert Sumlin,** who played in Howlin' Wolf's band for twenty years.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Dec. 13-14: Though she was unceremoniously dropped from her major-label record deal, the Boston-born post-folkie **Jonatha Brooke** makes Jewel seem like a beginner. Her latest CD, "Jonatha Brooke Live," is a charmer, but she's even better in the flesh. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 10: Having earned post-punk immortality as the force behind Hüsker Dü and pop kudos with the more nuanced Sugar, **Bob Mould** has now entered the elder-statesman phase of his complicated career.

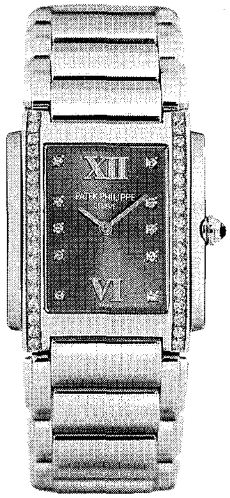
Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Dec. 10-12: Actress **Lea De Laria** lays on the holiday cheer with her comic variety show "Who You Callin' Ho, Ho, Ho: A Very Lea Christmas."

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 10-11: Dutch punk anarchists **The Ex.** With the rocking power chords of **Don Caballero.** Dec. 12: The Philadelphia outfit **Bardo Pond** weaves tapestries of crashing sound.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Dec. 9: **Boss Hog** (see the Bowery Ballroom). Dec. 10: Led by ex-Mekon guitarist Jon Langford (see BAM Café), the **Waco Brothers** mix punk and country with surprisingly wholesome results.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 8-9: **El Vez,** "the Mexican Elvis," presents a Christmas show. Señor Vez is far more than your run-of-the-mill Elvis impersonator: he claims to be the love child of the King and Charo. He sings in Spanish, putting, as he says, the "Mex in X-Mas." Dec. 11: **Waco Brothers** (see Maxwell's) and **Andrew Bird's Bowl of Fire.** The classically trained violinist Bird, a frequent collaborator with the Squirrel Nut Zippers, has put together an acoustic quartet that mixes folk, rock, lieder, and New Orleans jazz, but the element that unifies the whole (and saves the project from collapsing under its own ambition) is Bird's sense of humor

PATEK PHILIPPE
GENEVE



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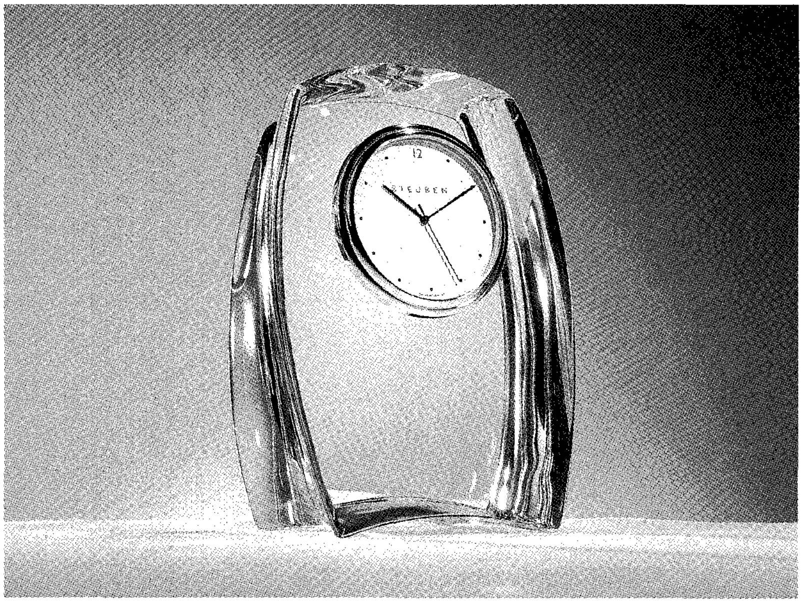

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and wit, as evidenced on the group's latest release, "Oh! The Grandeur." With **SALLY TIMMS.**

Rodeo Bar, 375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—Many bands hoping to make it big pack up their belongings and head for New York City. **THE EX-HUSBANDS** (Dec. 9-10) did just the opposite, leaving Gotham for digs in Nashville, which makes perfect sense considering that this trio aspires to roadhouse blues and hard-knock country. For all the Southern influence, though, they haven't lost their urban roots: one new song is titled "Flat Broke in Hoboken."

Uccellis, 124 N. 6th St., at Berry St., Brooklyn (718-599-5576)—If you can't make it to Argentina this week, do the next best thing and take in tango chanteuse **BIBI GONZALEZ** at this cozy Williamsburg restaurant on Dec. 8. Gonzalez, a former *telenovela* and film star from Argentina, is a fierce and tender singer with sleepy Piaf eyes. She is often joined by a chorus of Argentinean expats, and the show is so powerful you may feel transported to nineteen-thirties Buenos Aires. Joining Gonzalez for her last New York appearance before a six-month tour of Latin America is guitarist **NERY MARTÍNEZ** and sixty-year-old bandoneon great **TITO CASTRO,** who bears some resemblance to Astor Piazzolla and plays like a volcano.

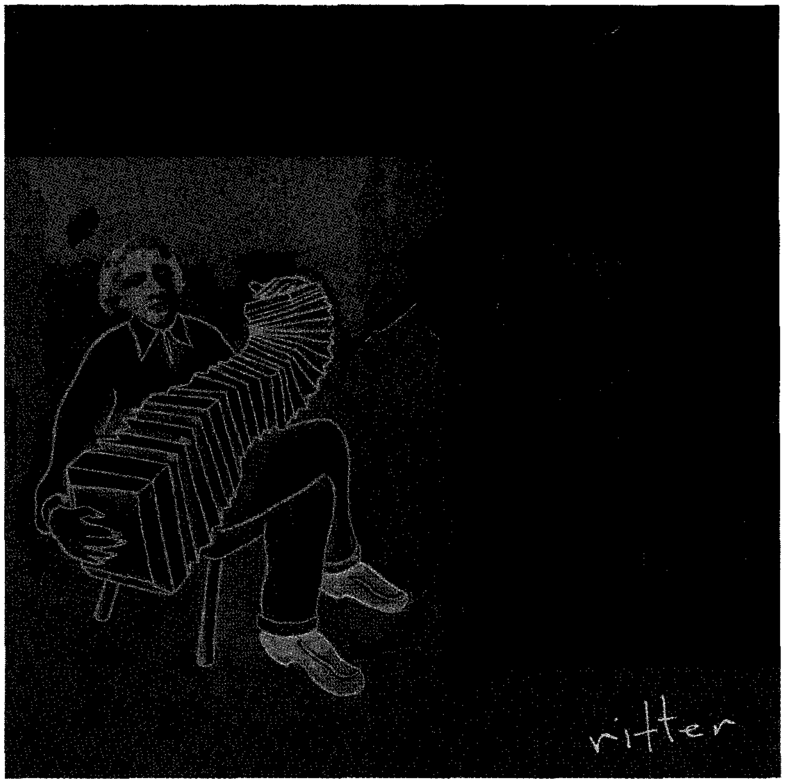
JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Dec. 9-11: Pianist and vocalist **FREDDY COLE** leads his trio through a program of his brother's music titled "A Nat King Cole Christmas." Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Dec. 12: The good old days are gone, but no one's quite broken the news to **JIMMY SMITH.** The father of Hammond-organ jazz-funk will be joined here by two of his old pals, drummer **GRADY TATE,** the man who laid down the outrageously swinging groove behind Smith's classic Verve recordings of the sixties, and **STANLEY TURRENTINE,** whose greased tenor saxophone has added depth to Smith's work throughout the past four decades. New-generation guitarist **MARK WHITFIELD** has enough Wes Montgomery and vigor in his playing to fit right in with a group of veterans still hungry for blood. Dining.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 13: **DON BYRON'S** latest release, "Romance with the Unseen," may not have the focus or bite of his best work, but it's hard to dismiss the force of the supporting players that the clarinettist assembled: drummer **JACK DE JOHNETTE,** guitarist **BILL FRISELL,** and bassist **DREW GRESS.** Live, the interaction between these modern virtuosos will certainly raise the stakes, and Byron's give-and-take with the inventive Frisell, one of his most responsive musical collaborators, is always thrilling.

The Cove, 2 South End Ave., Battery Park City (964-1500)—Dec. 9: Pianist and composer **JOEL FORRESTER** has quietly put together one of the best working bands in the city. **PEOPLE LIKE US**—with downtown M.V.P. bassist **DAVE HOFSTRA,** the lyrical baritone saxophonist **CLAIRE DALY,** and the irrepressibly swinging drummer **RONNIE WILLIAMS**—provides a taste of the delightful and quirky melodicism that Forrester, himself a brilliant, unclassifiable player, specializes in.



Tango chanteuse Bibi Gonzalez, at Uccellis.

JOHN RITTER

Iridium, 48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 12: The **JACKY TERRASSON** sextet. In a canny move, pianist Terrasson has added horns to his ensemble, a decision that may keep the occasional navel-gazing soloist from disappearing into his own reveries. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Pianists don't come any more swinging than **RAY BRYANT** (Dec. 8-12). Imagine Oscar Peterson's technique and Erroll Garner's buoyancy mated with an authentic feel for the blues. Bryant's an original and a pleasure to hear. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 9-12: The brilliant saxophonist and clarinettist **MARTY EHRLICH** leads a few smart musical ensembles, yet Traveler's Tales—named for a superb 1992 Ehrlich album—may be the most gripping. Keeping things lean, Traveler's Tales pairs the leader with rising-star saxophonist **TONY MALABY,** bassist **JEROME HARRIS,** and drummer **BOBBY PREVITE,** a player whose telepathic rapport with Ehrlich, developed over twenty years of collaboration, is a joy to hear. This is one band that deserves to thrive in the coming millennium.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Dec. 12: **DAVE KIKOSKI,** an agile post-bop pianist most frequently heard with drummer Roy Haynes, fronts a trio with the superbly volatile rhythm team of bassist **JOHN PATTITUCCI** and drummer **JEFF (TAIN) WATTS.** Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The **DAVÍD SANCHEZ** sextet. Sanchez, a budding tenor titan whose burly, tactile tone and architectural phrasing call to mind Sonny Rollins, takes command through Dec. 12. Latin idioms are Sanchez's trump card; others play with the whitewater rapids of their rhythmic currents, Sanchez plays across them. For this passionate talent, the clave carries as much weight as the cadence of hard bop. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Zinc Bar, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—Dec. 9: The Cuban guitarist **JUAN-CARLOS FORMELL** is joined by his compatriot violinist **ILMAR GAVILAN.** Saturdays and Sundays feature Brazilian jazz.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Only the Best: Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon" is home to eighty works, including paintings by Rubens, Fragonard, Turner, and Manet, while their permanent residence undergoes renovation. Through Feb. 27. . . . ¶ "Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch" offers forty paintings and ninety-two drawings of the nineteenth-century French élite. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ "Carleton Watkins: The Art of Perception" presents more than a hundred and twenty-five images by this pioneer of photography, who recorded the vastness of the American West. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," a sombre and ravishing survey of five hundred years of the millennia of Egyptian dynasties, covers the Old Kingdom (2650-2150 B.C.), the glorious formative period of Pharaonic art when the great pyramids were built and religious statuary rose to a refined naturalism. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Icons of Rock Style," at the Costume Institute. Through March 19. . . . ¶ "Daido Moriyama: Hunter," an exhibition of forty photographs made in postwar Japan. Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Things" is the final installment of "Modern Starts," the current triumvirate of shows drawn from MOMA's permanent collection, all focussed on the years 1880-1920. Smaller than its counterparts, "People" and "Places," "Things" occupies a single gallery on the ground floor and combines furniture, architectural elements, and decorative objects with photographs, paintings, and sculptures. The open floor plan is at odds with the show's thematic divisions, so that four magnificent Cézanne still-lifes of fruit seem inexplicably relegated to the "Guitars" area, with a group of Cubist paintings by Juan Gris, Picasso, and Le Corbusier. "People" runs through Feb. 1; "Places" and "Things" through March 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—A retrospective devoted to the Neapolitan painter Francesco Clemente presents more than two hundred paintings, frescoes, watercolors, pastels, sculptures, illustrations, and collaborative works. Through Jan. 9. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Part two of "The American Century" is a vast improvement over its predecessor, and not just because American art gathered momentum after the Second World War. The exhibition design as a whole is clearer: film clips and "historical" displays have been segregated to small side rooms, so they don't compete directly with the nearly seven hundred art works. Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—*National Geographic* meets the East Village in "Body Art: Marks of Identity," which proves that long before there were drunken sailors there were tattoos, not to mention piercing, scarification, and body shaping. Pre-Colombian nose ornaments from Peru go head to head with contemporary photographs of the pierced natives of New York and San Francisco. Near the end there's a wonderful short film featuring a young woman with a tattoo of Lucy, the three-million-something-year-old hominid fossil, a reminder that everything old can be new again. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Eastman Johnson: Painting America." Through Feb. 6. . . . ¶ "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection." Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Edgar Degas (1834-1917)—A selection of the celebrated late bronzes, accompanied by a handful of related drawings of horses, jockeys, dancers, and bathers. The only surprise is an installation in the back room, where the artist's idiosyncratic method of viewing his sculptures (described in the memoirs of his friend Walter Sickert) has been experimentally re-created. On a turntable, a bronze figure of a dancer revolves, her shadow projected against a white scrim; the slow transformations of her silhouette are mesmerizing. Who knew that the most conservative of the Impressionists was also a pioneer of video art? Through Dec. 24. (Mathes, 41 E. 57th St. 752-5135.)

Donald Evans (1945-77)—The first New York exhibition in more than twenty years of this philatelic watercolorist, who died in a fire in Amsterdam at the age of thirty-one. Evans may not have been the first person to paint postage stamps from fictional countries, but he was certainly the most dedicated, skilled, and sweetly whimsical. Representing such implausible principalities as Achterdijk, Sabot, Nadorp, and Mangiare, the examples here include tenderly rendered fruits, flowers, and landscapes, along with a series of twenty-five stamps commemorating "the Arms of the provinces of Pasta," each a single starchy icon, from "Spaghetto" to "Farfalla." Through Dec. 23. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

Julio Galán and **Ray Smith**—"Time and Again," a show of recent and older work by two leading Mexican painters. In the eighties, both practiced a kind of bravura, freewheeling Surrealism that led to comparisons with Julian Schnabel and David Salle, although the Mexicans' work, full of boldly painted animals, nudes, and costumes, was generally more direct and easier to like. To judge from the work here, both are going through awkward phases. Galán has abandoned his smooth, folk-art-inspired style for crowded, sloppy semi-abstractions, decorated with rhinestones and homoerotic photographs. Smith, meanwhile, seems to have put his imagery through an egg slicer; the clunky, striped look of his new canvases recalls James Rosenquist's paintings of a decade ago. Both shows through Jan. 6. (Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090.)

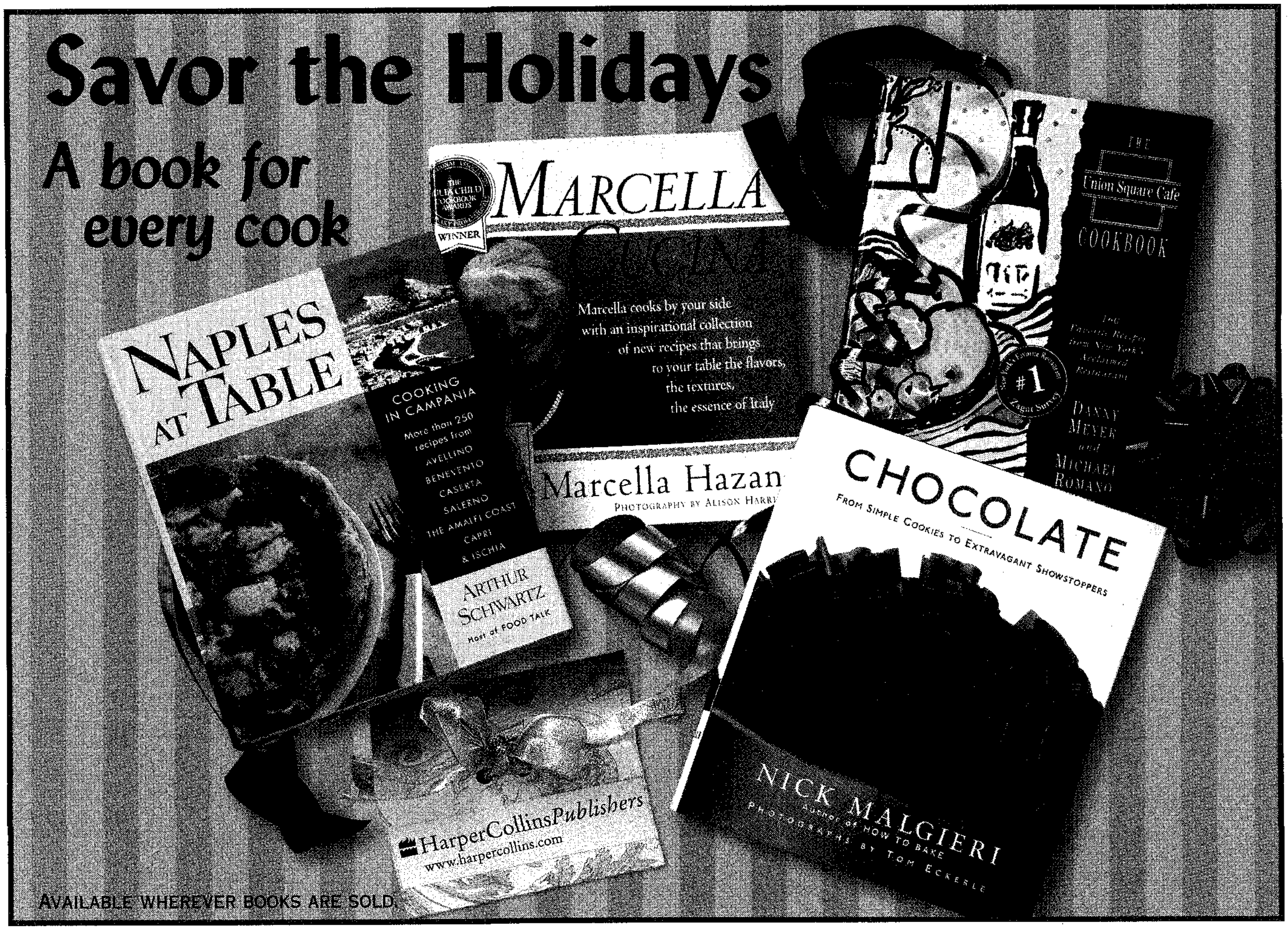
William Tucker—More of this British sculptor's mammoth bronze or plaster megaliths. The centerpiece here is a ten-foot-tall variant of the prehistoric Venus de Willendorf, shorn of its extremities; lumpy shoulders and breasts sit atop a giant, protruding belly. The smaller pieces are barely recognizable heads, with ruddery noses and gashed, suffering mouths, like those of the Lindow Man, unearthed after two thousand years in a peat bog. With their mythological titles, gouged surfaces and coy anthropomorphism, Tucker's works project a pompously tragic view of the world. Through Dec. 11. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 688-5951.)

"Saved from Europe"—A distinguished loan show commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of this gallery, and the escape of Otto Kallir, its founder. Fleeing the Nazis in 1938, Kallir arrived in New York a year later with a trove of work by modern Austrian and German artists, at that time little known in this country. Among the more than fifty paintings, prints, and drawings reunited here are masterworks by Kokoschka, Schiele, and especially Klimt, including the latter's superb painting of a tiny calm infant hidden within a maelstrom of brightly patterned blankets. Through Jan. 8. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

Short List—**LESLIE LERNER,** Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 980-2323. Through Dec. 18. . . . **CILDO MEIRELES,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Jan. 15. . . . **RICHARD SERRA,** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through Jan. 14. (See also Galleries—Chelsea.) . . . **SAUL STEINBERG,** Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338. Through Dec. 18.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Tony Feher—Transforming the flotsam of everyday life into quietly beautiful sculpture, Feher infuses the restrained vocabulary of Minimalism with humanity and wit. Often the work is laced with personal narrative: the size of a stack of silver cans is determined by the artist's height, and the arrangement, with its round black magnets holding the cans in place, suggests the spinal column. A circular floor piece of confetti-colored cat's-eye marbles and pennies is



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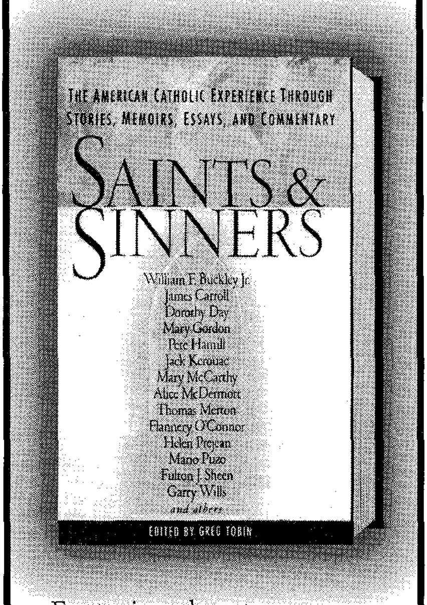

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Carl Andre at the five-and-dime. Through Dec. 23. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.)

JULIAN LAVERDIERE—This is the first solo show by a young artist whose technical ingenuity and narrative sensibility could land him a job with George Lucas (his attention to the lost-ark theme couldn't hurt). Meticulously rendered plastic models—a sunken V-2 missile, a shipwreck, a rusty safe—are housed in futuristic capsules, accompanied by digitally manipulated photographs and a DVD projection. The dimmed lights and pulsing techno soundtrack hinder rather than heighten the experience of the work, which, though intriguing, is somehow too cryptic yet too literal. Through Dec. 18. (Kreps, 529 W. 20th St. 741-8849.)

MARIA MARSHALL—On the heels of last year's controversial début, in which the artist's toddler was seen (on film) blowing smoke rings, this British artist continues her mind-bending takes on child-rearing with three laser-disk projections featuring the kindergarten set. By far the most arresting and disturbing work is the silent "Don't Let the T-Rex Get the Children." It opens with a shot of a licking tongue, then slowly pulls back to reveal a little boy with a shaved head and a demonic grin, straitjacketed in a padded cell. The loop is less than two minutes long, but its creeping pace feels eternal and the anxiety is almost too much to bear. Through Dec. 23. (Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219.)

STEPHEN MURPHY—The first New York show of a British artist who takes great pains to render lifelike natural environments digitally. Two laser-disk projections—one's a dream, the other's a clunker—stake their claim in the front gallery. The mesmerizing "Snowfall" fills three screens with a night sky that swells from light flurry to near-blizzard. The longer you look, the more the hallucinatory image shifts—from bucolic to galactic to abstract. Nearby, "Asteroid" rotates over and over in outer space like a fugitive from the Sci-Fi Channel. Through Dec. 18. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

RICHARD SERRA—The man of steel is back and better than ever, inaugurating the latest (and most gargantuan) outpost of the Gagosian empire. Six curving monoliths, each fifty-two feet long and thirteen and a half feet high, are installed in a triangular configuration. A series of narrow passages converge in a central space that recalls either a Zendo or lockdown, depending on your mood: The planar shifts of the soaring, rusted slabs make you feel that you're both within and outside of the sculpture. A rare opportunity to use the words "graceful" and "two-ton" in the same sentence. Through Feb. 26. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111. See also Uptown Short List.)

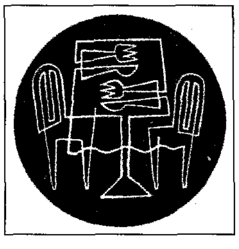
SHORT LIST—**ANNE CHU**, AC Project Room, 453 W. 17th St. 645-4970. Through Jan. 15. . . . **MARTIN HONERT**, Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through Dec. 24. . . . **LARI PITTMAN**, Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300. Through Dec. 23. . . . **PAT STEIR**, Marlborough, 211 W. 19th St. 463-8634. Through Jan. 1. . . . **RACHEL WHITEREAD**, Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100. Through Dec. 18.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ISSEY MIYAKE—The Ace gallery puts on a museum-quality installation extravaganza (and, like a museum, charges gallerygoers to see it). The entry hall glitters with a gold-and-silver recycling project that stretches from floor to ceiling—cast-off clothes pressed between sheets of foil that betray the shimmering outlines of old socks, jeans, and T-shirts. Miyake has engineered a great range of effects: in one room, sixteen of the designer's airy and outlandish outfits—origami ninja suits, Cat-in-the-Hat party jammies, Noguchi-lamp outfits—bounce in the air with a weird jauntiness. A giant roll of tube-knit black dresses snakes from one mannequin to the next. Down the hall, computer projections of single sheets of fabric morph into dresses or outfits, and projecting this transubstantiation onto the gallery's cement floor creates a ghostly effect—as though only our clothes had the power to rise from the grave. Through Feb. 29. (275 Hudson St. 255-5599.)

SHORT LIST—**RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER**, Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through Dec. 18. . . . **GORDON MATTA-CLARK**, Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through Dec. 24. . . . **SARAH MORRIS**, Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466. Through Dec. 22. . . . **FRANK STELLA**, Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through Dec. 11.

TABLES FOR TWO



AL DI LÀ, 248 Fifth Ave., at Carroll St., Brooklyn (718-783-4565)—The risotto at this casually elegant Venetian trattoria comes with an unecessary apology: "It will take some time," says the proprietor, Emiliano Coppa. "Shortcuts are taken these days, I know, but there's really no other way but to stir." And that's what the chef—his wife, Anna Klinger—does. Adding little more to the rice beyond a few shards of lemon zest, broth, and wine, she faithfully spends the twenty minutes of constant labor required to bring the dish to life. ("Stirring relaxes me," she says.) Served on the restaurant's mismatched flea-market china, her version embodies the sublime simplicity at the heart of the region's cuisine.

Meanwhile, Coppa leads diners through the storefront space to long rustic wooden tables, above which an exquisite Murano chandelier, transported from his grandmother's home in Venice, is suspended from a patched tin ceiling. In addition to the exemplary risotto, guests can dine on humble salt cod, which is first simmered for hours in milk, then whipped with more of the same and extra-virgin olive oil into a sweet, fresh-tasting purée; a nutty whole-wheat spaghetti tossed with *bottarga*—this is a dish that shows how much Italians can do with something as plain as a piece of dried tuna roe; or ravioli filled with beets tamed to a creamy rose hue, and sprinkled with poppy seeds. Calf liver alla Veneziana is also excellent, its mineral nature offset by triangles of charred polenta and caramelized onions. The wines (notable among them a Ruché from Piemonte) come mostly from the local vintners Coppa knew when he was head of a cooking school in Italy, and they're served as plainly as everything else here, in tumblers.

The charm of this neighborly spot makes the local crowd—a mix that on a recent night included young couples on dates, an older foursome debating politics, a single man sharing spoonfuls of *latte bruciato* (burnt milk) with a baby at the next table—want to linger, and the contentment grows with an after-dinner cup of perfect *caffè* or a *vino dolce* from Sardinia, which captures, in a glass, all the wildness of that place. (Open daily, except Tuesdays, for dinner. Entrées $9-$17.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Dec. 8-9: When the S.S. Central America went down off the coast of South Carolina, in 1857, it was bound for New York laden with more than four hundred pounds of California gold—bars, ingots, coins, and dust—it had picked up in Panama. The cargo was eagerly awaited by banks in New York, which needed to replenish their reserves following depositors' withdrawals on the heels of a high-profile corporate failure. The loss of the Central America's cargo compounded the financial catastrophe and led immediately to the Panic of 1857, a low point in the history of Wall Street. The steamship's insurers eventually covered the losses, and when the gold was recovered, ten years ago, they were awarded a percentage of the treasure. And here it is. . . . ¶ Dec. 9: Antiquities from the estate of Christos G. Bastis. . . . ¶ Dec. 10: Antiquities and Islamic art. . . . ¶ Dec. 14: United States and foreign coins. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Dec. 8: Ancient and modern jewelry. . . . ¶ Dec. 9: Antiquities. . . . ¶ Dec. 10: Books, manuscripts, and historical documents, including ten letters from Ernest Hemingway to Jane Kendall Mason, with whom the author enjoyed a liaison in 1932-33. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.) . . . At **CHRISTIE'S EAST:** Dec. 8: Twentieth-century decorative art. . . . ¶ Dec. 9: Jewelry. . . . ¶ Dec. 13: Decorative pictures. . . . ¶ Dec. 14: European decorative art. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430.)

Phillips—An auction of wines includes a complete vertical collection of Château Mouton-Rothschild from 1945 through 1996 as well as an exceptional infusion of rare and vintage ports. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830. Dec. 11.)

Doyle—Jewelry, watches, silverware, and coins. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. Dec. 8-9.)

Swann—Dec. 9: Photographs and related literature. . . . ¶ Dec. 10: A sale of cameras and viewing devices. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

New York Armory Christmas Antiques Show—A hundred dealers of various stripes. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Dec. 8-12. For information, call 472-1180.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

International Center of Photography—"Propaganda and Dreams: Photographing the 1930s in the USSR and the US." Through Feb. 13. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List—**TOM BARIL,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through Dec. 11. . . . **TINA BARNEY,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Dec. 18. . . . **JAYNE HINDS BIDAUT** and **LARRY GIANETTINO,** Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Both shows through Jan. 15. . . . **BRASSAÏ,** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through Jan. 8. . . . **ELAINE LUSTIG COHEN** and **DIDIER MASSARD,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Both shows through Jan. 15. . . . **JOHN COPLANS,** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Through Jan. 15. . . . **JOHN DUGDALE,** Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through Jan. 9. . . . **MASAHISA FUKASE,** Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600. Through Dec. 11. . . . **TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Dec. 18. . . . **HIRO,** Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through Jan. 15. . . . **ANDREA ROBBINS AND MAX BECHER,** Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450. Through Jan. 29. . . . **DENNIS STOCK,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Jan. 22. . . . **THOMAS STRUTH,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Dec. 31. . . . **JERRY UELSMANN,** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Dec. 24.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum.)

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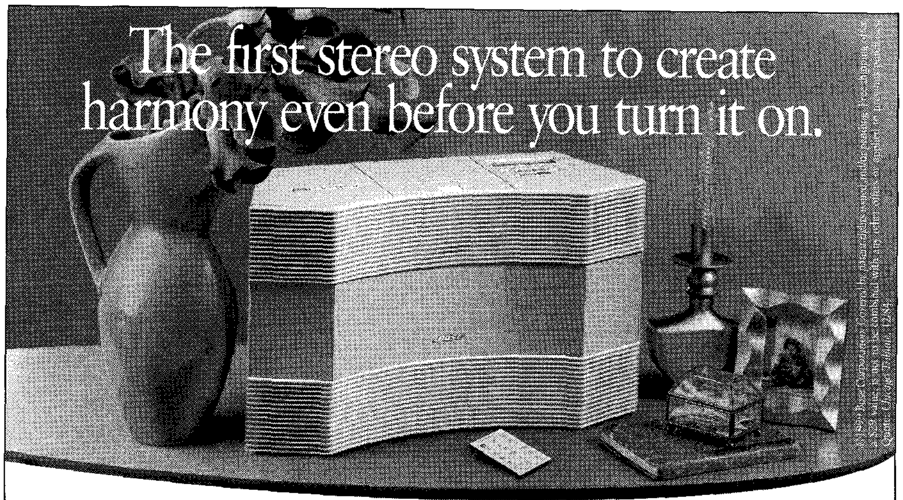
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ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Under the Tree

More than seventy years ago, Zelda Fitzgerald described Manhattan as a town where "one may buy an apple with as much ritual as if it was the Ottoman Empire, or a limousine as carelessly as . . . a postage stamp." In our own unfettered era, holiday shopping in the city remains full of such eye-popping possibilities.

FOR WOMEN

THE lady on your list who is still enthusiastic about this millennium business might be happy to unwrap a commemorative tiara, in which case **Jeffrey,** just off the river in the meatpacking district (449 W. 14th St.; 206-1272), can supply a fine example, with 2000 spelled out in amber crystals ($125). Only slightly less insouciant are the shop's jaunty rubber clogs ($50), available in unexpected shades of hyacinth and daffodil. (They'll never need a shine—you just hose them down.) At **Calypso on Broome** (424 Broome St.; 274-0449), practical headgear—a hand-knit hat with pointy ears—sports two long woolly braids, affording the wearer a chance to resemble both Red Riding Hood *and* the wolf ($80). Further downtown in Tribeca, **Shack** (137 West Broadway; 267-8004), a store that specializes in slicked-up versions of the clothes people are wearing in W.P.A. photographs, has evening bags by Mildred Beltre which incorporate African beaded hems, winsome childlike hand-stitching, ribbon-tape trim, and other modest charms ($130-$225). The pristine white Parisian blouses that are the draw at **Anne Fontaine** (93 Greene St.; 343-3154) come by their crispness the old-fashioned way—a vendeuse was ironing in the corner on a recent visit. Details like belted backs and plissé collars are responsible for their not inconsiderable appeal; they're so sophisticated they even have names. The fetching Fleur, so called on account of its rosette buttons, is $175. A woman whose heart is stuck firmly back at the turn of the last century is the intended recipient of a bibelot from **Alice Kwartler** (123 E. 57th St.; 752-3590), a dealer besotted with enamel-topped crystal perfume bottles, enamel-backed bevelled mirrors, and other delicate boudoir necessities. A quartet composed of a pale-yellow-and-pink enamelled comb, miniature lipstick case, rouge tub, and powder compact, still nestled in its original leather pouch, looks like it just got home from a wild night in Mrs. Astor's living room ($900).

FOR MEN

SOMEONE who has spent the past decade giving and receiving every conceivable technological gadget might well regard as a breath of fresh air an exquisite custom-made alligator desk blotter ($5,000), from **DB Firenze** (53 E. 58th St.; 688-8777), that can be ordered in any of thirty colors (once glimpsed, the ruby red is difficult to dismiss). Accompanying letter trays ($4,500) and pencil cups ($1,050) are among the available accessories, for those times when the cold efficiency of E-mail just won't do.

Though a necktie may not seem like the most original holiday gift, **Yves St. Laurent Rive Gauche Homme** (88 Wooster St.; 274-0522) has come up with an example that manages to evoke the heyday of the Via Veneto while still looking completely contemporary: it's silver silk and sparingly trimmed with bugle beads ($280). Other imaginative haberdashery includes gloves with black fingers and black-and-white striped bodies ($320) and a porkpie hat that isn't too timid to turn up in heliotrope leather ($970).

A gentlemen who has no truck with beads and lavender derbies might be better off with a gift from **Jay Kos** (986 Lexington Ave.; 327-2382), where a heathery cashmere polo shirt has the distinction of being lined in a foulard silk usually reserved for ascots ($795). Argyle socks that combine pale yellow and a color that used to be called Depression green seem to have fallen out of Bertie Wooster's armoire ($35); the man who wears them might also carry one of the shop's ebony walking sticks topped with sterling animals, of which the hare and the monkey are particularly winning examples ($550-$750).

FOR CHILDREN

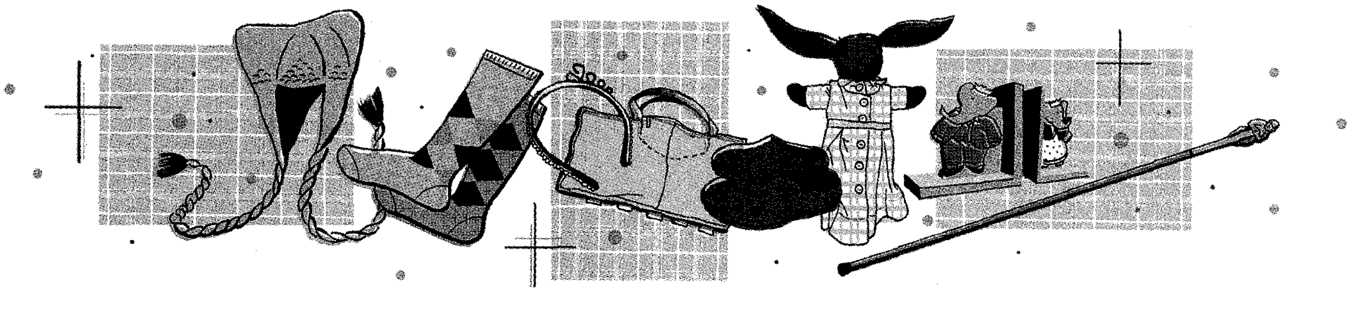
BABAR, Tintin, and Astérix are the guests of choice at **Karikter** (19 Prince St.; 274-1966), where they grace everything from cutlery to yo-yos. A pair of wooden bookends depict Babar dressed in a three-piece green suit and Celeste in a red capelet that could have come from a nearby SoHo store ($42); a watch starring Tintin's dog Milou has a band that is half blue and half yellow ($75). Related comic-book literature, together with a Lilliputian French-English dictionary ($3.75), might sweeten the bitter lot of a reluctant French student. Someone too young to worry about grades is the ideal candidate for the velvet bunny at **En Soie** (988 Madison Ave.; 717-7958), a toy (two feet tall, ears unfurled) whose appeal does not depend on the vagaries of fashion, though she does wear layers of gingham—camisole, slip, and frock—that are replicas of clothing the store sells in adult sizes ($180).

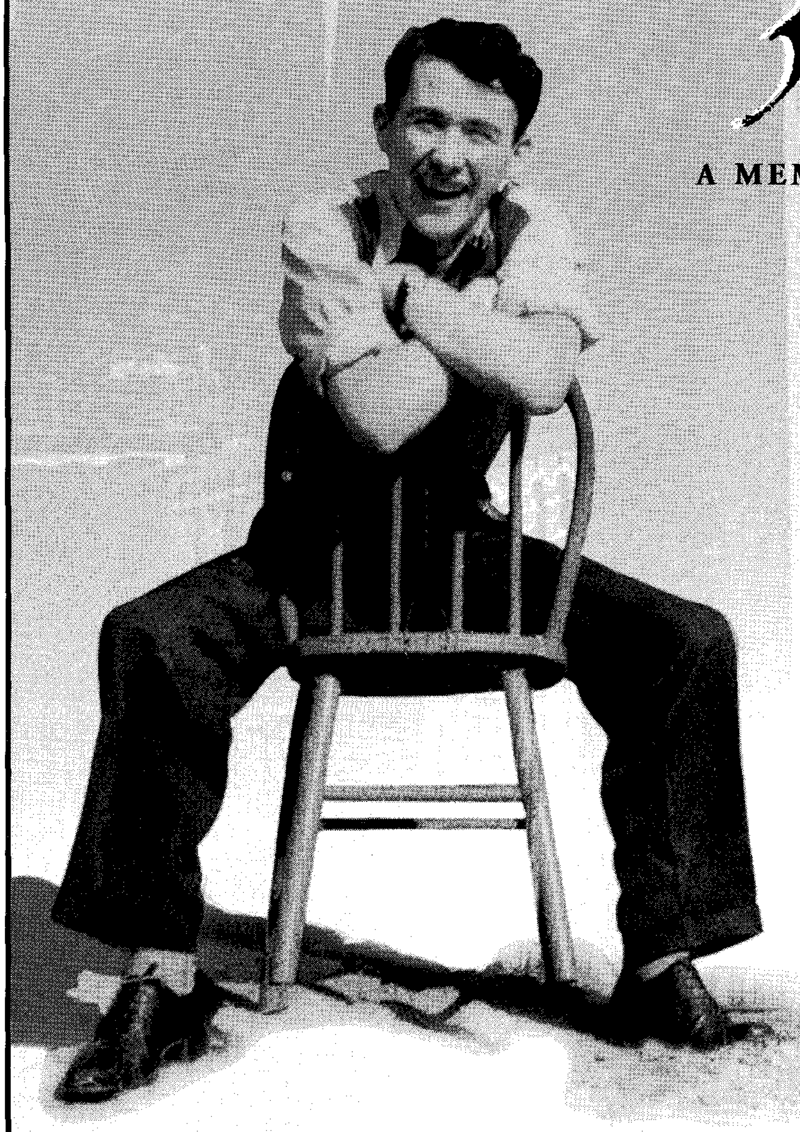
The kits and contraptions at **Star Magic** (1256 Lexington Ave., 988-0300; 745 Broadway, 228-7770), a strobe-lit emporium popular with shoppers of a certain age (say eight to thirteen), include an array of items capable of curing those dull stretches that can crop up during the best-planned winter vacation. A compilation of fifty card and dice tricks comes complete with a deck plus two pairs of dice, one normal, the other decidedly tricky ($6.95); an "interactive kaleidoscope" called the Odyssey ($15.95) boasts a family-photo holder, for predictably hilarious, if refracted, results. A Movie Motion Zoetrope ($9.95) offers a plastic viewer, twelve animated paper strips, and, for budding Lumière brothers (or sisters), twelve do-it-yourself strips.

Lastly, those people playing loud music in their room and refusing to speak to anyone in the house would perhaps condescend to open a bottle of Funeral Home cologne from **Demeter Fragrances** (83 Second Ave.; 505-1535), an East Village perfumery that also offers scents with names like Crust of Bread, Mildew, and Dirt ($12.50 each). A dab of one of these behind an abundantly punctured earlobe might just convince these characters to drop the sullen pose and join the rest of you at the dinner table.

—Lynn Yaeger

EDEL RODRIGUEZ





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San Francisco Chronicle

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—Peter Collier,
Los Angeles Times Book Review

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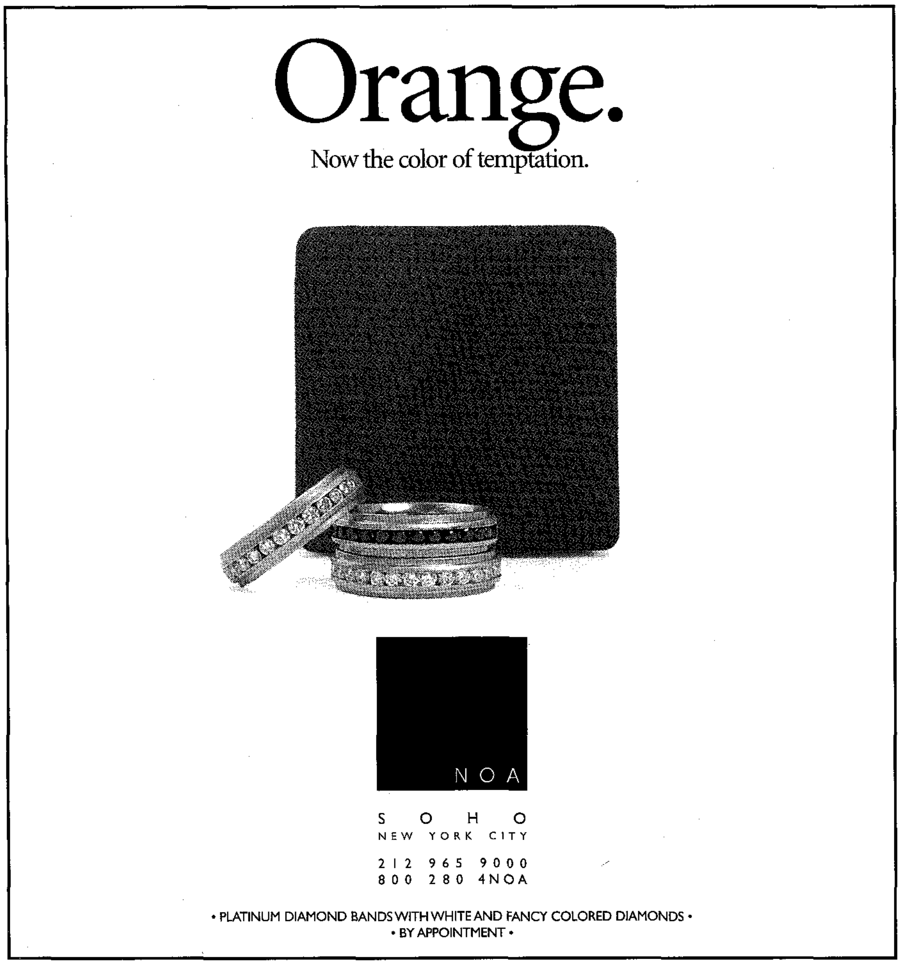
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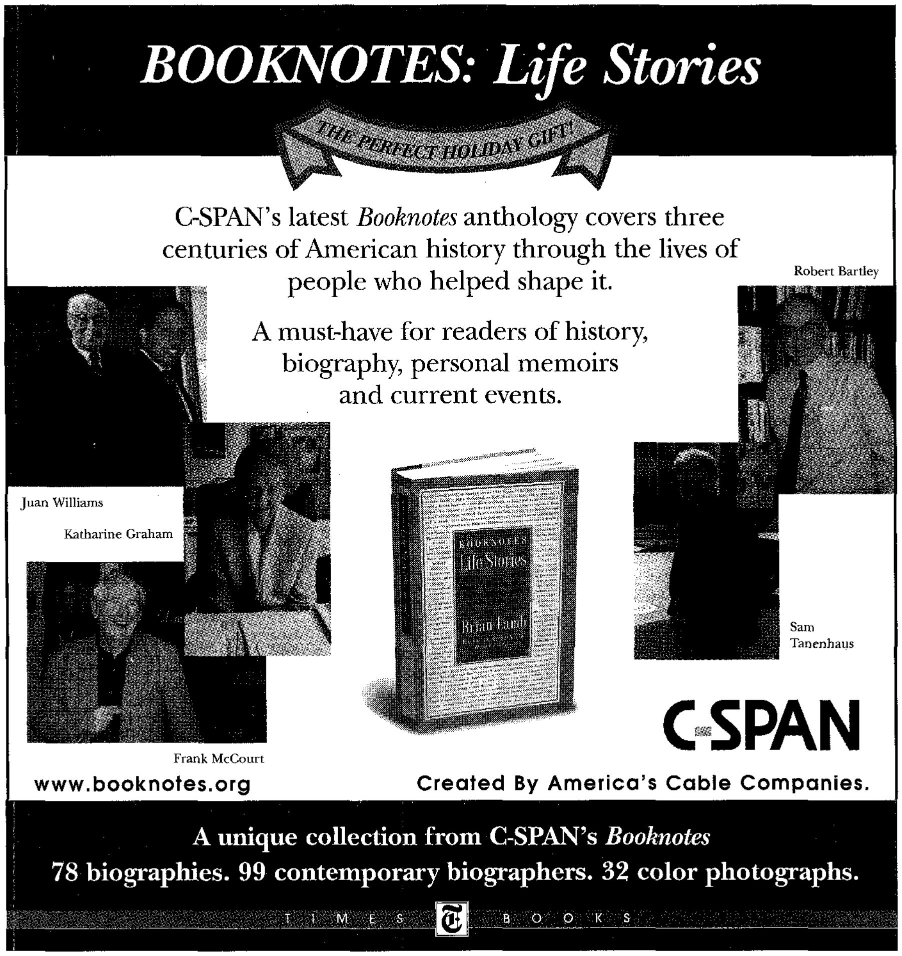
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CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Avery Fisher Hall is 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; for the Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St., 570-3949; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St., 996-1100.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

HANDEL'S "MESSIAH"—In a peculiar take on this classic, Millennial Arts Productions offers "Messiah" staged as an opera, set in the Bedlam asylum, with the arias sung as cathartic outgrowths of a therapy session. Kenneth Hamrick conducts a period-instrument ensemble and several soloists. (John Jay Theatre, Tenth Ave. at 59th St. Dec. 9-11 at 7:30 and Dec. 12 at 5. For more information, call 307-4100.) . . . ¶ Other organizations are offering more traditional "Messiah"'s this week, including the **TRINITY CHURCH CHOIR** and the period-instrument ensemble **REBEL** (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St; 602-0873. Dec. 12 at 3; they also offer the Christmas portion alone at the church on Dec. 13 at 1, with admission by contribution); the **WEST VILLAGE CHORALE**, which Gwen Gould directs in an audience sing-along (St. Luke's In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St.; Dec. 13 at 7:30; for more information, call 570-7301); the **ST. THOMAS CHOIR** and the period-instrument orchestra **CONCERT ROYAL**, with soprano Julianne Baird, countertenor Drew Minter, tenor Mark Bleeke, and bass Nathaniel Watson, directed by Gerre Hancock (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St.; 664-9360; Dec. 14 and Dec. 16 at 7:30); and the **NATIONAL CHORALE**, with Martin Josman directing (Avery Fisher Hall; Dec. 14 at 8).

ARTEK—The singers and period-instrument players, directed by Gwendolyn Toth, perform seventeenth-century Christmas music from Italy, Spain, and the Spanish colonies of the New World. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. 967-9157. Dec. 9 at 8.)

NEW YORK POPS—Skitch Henderson leads holiday favorites, with the Abyssinian Baptist Church Choir. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 10-11 at 8.)

LITTLE ORCHESTRA SOCIETY—Dino Anagnost leads the orchestra and the Metropolitan Singers/The Greek Choral Society in candlelit performances of Poulenc's "Gloria," Rimsky-Korsakov's "Christmas Eve" Suite, and Robert Russell Bennett's "Carol Cantata," among other works. (Holy Trinity Cathedral, 319 E. 74th St. Dec. 11 at 7. For information about tickets, call 971-9500.)

POLYHYMNIA—The vocal ensemble offers a Christmas Mass by the early-Tudor-period composer Robert Fayrfax, a favorite of both Henry VII and Henry VIII. Carols of the period round out the program. (St. John's In-the-Village, 218 W. 11th St., at Waverly Pl. Dec. 11 at 8. For information about tickets, call 917-918-0943.)

WAVERLY CONSORT—The early-music group recounts the Christmas story through medieval vocal and instrumental music. (The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 650-2280. Dec. 12 and Dec. 19 at 1 and 3.)

NEW AMSTERDAM BAROQUE—English chamber music, including some Christmas selections, in the octagonal drawing room of Manhattan's oldest house. (Morris-Jumel Mansion, 65 Jumel Terrace, between 160th and 162nd Sts. 923-8008. Dec. 12 at 2.)

CHOIRS OF ST. LUKE'S IN-THE-FIELDS—David Shuler directs Vivaldi's "Gloria," Alessandro Scarlatti's cantata "O di Betlemme Altera" (with soprano Marcia Young as soloist), a carol cantata by Bruce Saylor, and settings of traditional carols. (487 Hudson St., at Grove St. Dec. 12 at 4. Tickets at the door.)

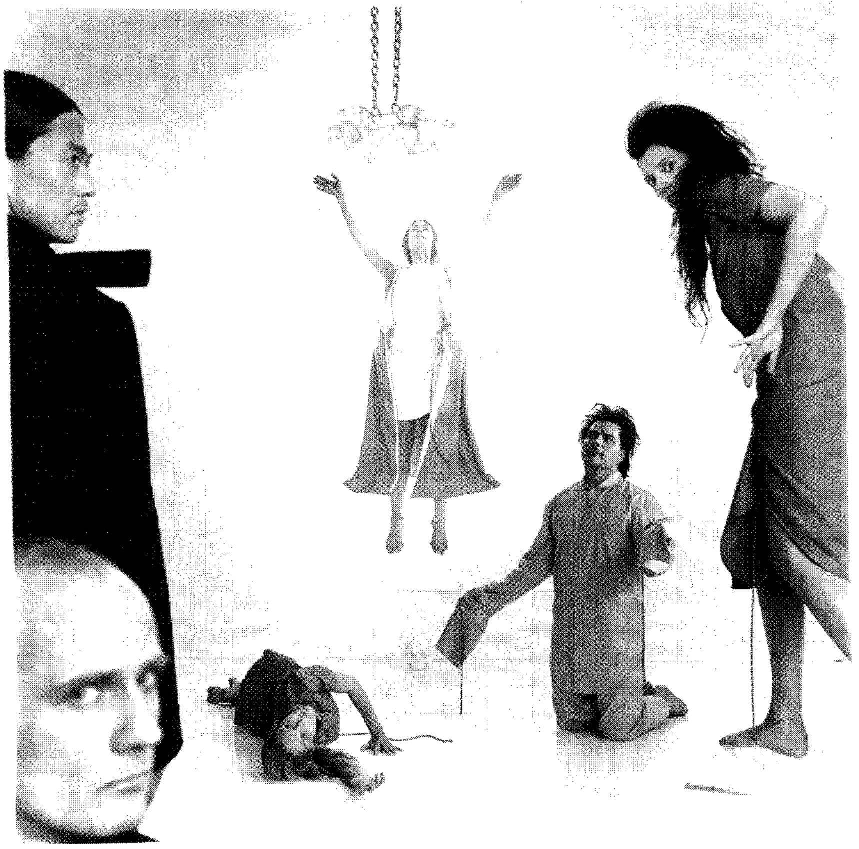
VIENNA CHOIR BOYS—Lucio Golino leads a wide-ranging holiday program. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 12 at 7:30.)

SHARING THE SPIRIT—Actors Betty Buckley, Julie Harris, Cherry Jones, and Victor Garber join two of the choirs from St. Bartholomew's in the church's Byzantine expanses for a candlelit evening of readings, carols, and seasonal choral classics, as an AIDS benefit. (Park Ave. at 50th St. 378-0248. Dec. 13-14 at 7:30.)

Vox Vocal Ensemble—George Steel directs Renaissance Christmas music by Palestrina, Clemens non Papa, and others. (Casa Italiana, Columbia University, Amsterdam Ave. at 117th St. Dec. 14 at 6. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 854-4437.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR**, with Ruth Ann Swenson, Ramón Vargas, Leo Nucci, and Michele Pertusi; conducted by Edoardo Müller. (Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 11 at 12:30.) . . . **L'ELISIR D'AMORE**, with Angela Gheorghiu, Roberto Alagna, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Paul Plishka; Evelino Pidò. (Dec. 9 and Dec. 13 at 8.) . . . **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO**, with Amanda Roocroft, Barbara Bonney, Susanne Mentzer, Bo Skovhus, and Ildebrando D'Arcangelo; Edo de Waart. (Dec. 10 at 8.) . . . **TRISTAN UND ISOLDE**, with Jane Eaglen, Katarina Dalayman, Ben Heppner, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, and René Pape; James Levine. (Dec. 11 and Dec. 14 at 7.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)



Handel's "Messiah," staged by Millennial Arts Productions at John Jay Theatre.

JOSEF ASTOR

Manhattan School of Music Opera Theatre—Presenting a fully staged production of William Mayer's "A Death in the Family," based on James Agee's novel (and its theatrical adaptation by Tod Mosel, which was unveiled, in 1960, under the title "All the Way Home"). (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 428. Dec. 8 and Dec. 10 at 8 and Dec. 12 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall, the orchestra performs the final concerts of its Copland festival. Dec. 9 at 8: Marin Alsop conducts "El Salón México," "Statements," "Connotations," "Quiet City" (with trumpeter Philip Smith and English hornist Thomas Stacy), and "Music for a Great City." . . . ¶ Dec. 10-11 at 8: Andrew Litton conducts Copland's First and Third Symphonies, in addition to five of his "Old American Songs," featuring mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne. . . . **NOTE:** Lectures or performances precede each concert, including, on Dec. 9, a program of Copland's choral works, featuring the Westminster Choir.

Boston Symphony—Seiji Ozawa conducts Debussy's "Nuages" and "Fêtes" (from his "Nocturnes"), Lutoslawski's Concerto for Orchestra, and Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (with Itzhak Perlman as soloist). (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 8-9 at 8.)

New York Youth Symphony—In the opening concert of the ensemble's season, Mischa Santora conducts Mendelssohn's "Hebrides Overture," the première of David Ludwig's "Ares," Mozart's motet "Exsultate, Jubilate" (with soprano Benita Valente), and Elgar's "Enigma" Variations. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 12 at 2.)

RECITALS

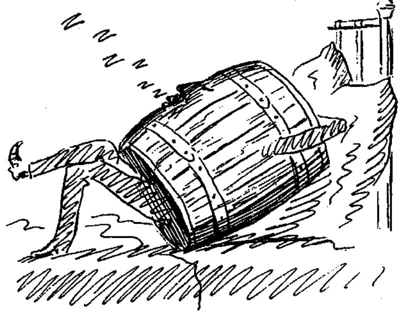
Douglas Riva and Pedro Carboné—The two pianists are featured in a pair of all-Spanish concerts. Dec. 8 at 7: Music by Turina and Falla, as well as a recently discovered piece by Granados. (Spanish Institute, 684 Park Ave. 628-0420.) . . . ¶ Dec. 12 at 8:30: Music by Albéniz, Granados (the "new" piece), and Turina, with the members of the Perspectives Ensemble. (Weill Recital Hall.)

Festival Chamber Music Society—Clarinettist Charles Neidich is featured in Prokofiev's "Overture on Hebrew Themes," Schumann's "Märchenerzählungen," and Hummel's Clarinet Quintet in E-Flat Major. Brahms's Piano Quintet rounds out the program. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Dec. 8 at 8.)

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—Presenting an all-Bach program that includes the Second "Brandenburg" Concerto. (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 8 at 8.)

Juilliard Percussion Ensemble—Daniel Druckman directs works by five Scandinavian composers, including Poul Ruders and Per

IT SLEEPS ALONE



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Nørgård. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 8 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Chopin Chats—Both of New York's principal piano-recital-with-commentary series focus on Chopin this week. Dec. 8 at 8: Jeffrey Siegel explores the composer's Irish connections. (92nd Street Y.) . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 7: Ruth Laredo is joined by cellist Nathaniel Rosen. (Metropolitan Museum.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Clarinettist David Shifrin is joined by several colleagues to play recent works by Alvin Singleton, Allen Shawn, Tina Davidson, and Daniel Godfrey. (Rose Rehearsal Studio, Rose Building, Tenth Floor, Lincoln Center. Dec. 9 at 6:45 and 8:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5788.)

Michael Kimmelman—Here's a question: is it more inappropriate for New York's leading art museum to invite the chief art critic of the *Times* to use its stage to fulfill his Mittyesque dream of being a concert pianist, or for that critic to accept, thereby potentially compromising his objectivity in evaluating the museum's activities? Mr. Kimmelman offers a performance with discussion that focusses on Bach's Partita No. 1, as part of the museum's "Interpreting Bach" presentations. (Metropolitan Museum. Dec. 9 at 7.)

Bargemusic—Ronald Thomas plays Bach's Suite No. 3 for Unaccompanied Cello; violinist Irina Murriseanu and pianist Randall Hodgkinson join him for piano trios by Mozart (in C Major, K. 548) and Dvořák (in E Minor, the "Dumky"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Dec. 9 at 7:30 and Dec. 12 at 4.)

Music by Skalkottas—A child prodigy on the violin, Nikos Skalkottas (1904-49) left his native Greece to study composition in Berlin, where he gained notice as one of Schoenberg's most original pupils. Traumatized by the Nazis' rise to power, he returned to Athens in 1933 suffering from a creative block and went back to earning his living as a back-of-the-section orchestral violinist. There he undertook a systematic study of Greek folk music, which inspired him to create astonishing orchestral versions of thirty-six Greek dances, a worthy Hellenic counterpart to Bartók's Hungarian and Romanian collections. Though he recovered his energy and composed diligently in his remaining years, his œuvre remained unpublished and unperformed until after his death. In this concert, vocalist Haleh Abghari, violinist Jorja Fleezanis, cellist André Emelianoff, and pianist Idith Meshulam mark the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death by performing a representative selection of his output, including both atonal pieces and works based on Greek folklore. (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 10 at 8.)

Guarneri Quartet—The foursome plays string quartets by Haydn (in G Major, Op. 77, No. 1), Schumann (in F Major, Op. 41, No. 2), and Mendelssohn (in E-Flat Major, Op. 44, No. 3). (Metropolitan Museum. Dec. 11 at 8.)

Ignat Solzhenitsyn—Pianist, performing sonatas by Beethoven (in F Major, Op. 10, No. 2), Prokofiev (his Eighth), and Schubert (in D Major, D. 850). (Washington Irving High School, Irving Pl. at 16th St. Dec. 11 at 8. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

Yakov Kasman—In his New York début recital, the silver medalist of the 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition performs Schumann's "Waldscenen," Stravinsky's "Trois Mouvements de 'Pétroushka,' " and sonatas by Medtner, Haydn, and Prokofiev (his Eighth). (92nd Street Y. Dec. 11 at 8.)

PoulencPlus!—The centennial festival reaches its close as several singers (including tenor Michel Sénéchal) join pianist Dalton Baldwin, a longtime Poulenc associate, in a wide-ranging program of vocal works and reminiscences. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Dec. 12 at 3.)

Arve Tellefsen—Violinist, with pianist Havard Gimse, performing sonatas by Nielsen and Grieg, among other works. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Dec. 12 at 5.)

Juilliard String Quartet—The soprano Benita Valente is renowned for her poised readings of the classical repertoire, but she's also an intrepid new-music enthusiast. Among the many works she has inspired are three important pieces for string quartet with voice, by Alberto Ginastera (his Quartet No. 3, from 1974), John Harbison ("The Reawaking," from 1991), and Richard Wernick (his Quartet No. 5, introduced in 1996). She was assisted by the Juilliard String Quartet in the premières of all three. In this concert, the forces reassemble for the Harbison and the Ginastera, in a concert that also includes Mendelssohn's String Quartet in D Major (Op. 44, No. 1). (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Dec. 13 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

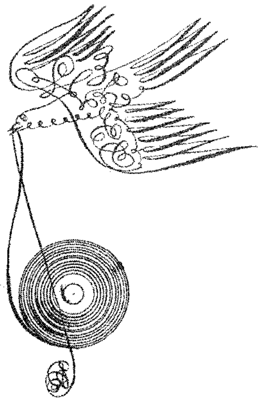
"Music of the Jewish Spirit"—Sacred and secular works by (among others) Paul Schoenfield and Leonard Bernstein, performed by clarinettist Todd Palmer, violinist Barry Shiffman, pianist Margaret Kampmeier, and the New York Concert Singers (directed by Judith Clurman). (92nd Street Y. Dec. 14 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Readings—Dec. 8 at 7: By Sheila Kohler, Patrick McGrath, and Lily Tuck, from their fiction. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Dec. 8 at 8: By Lee Stringer, the formerly homeless author of "Grand Central Winter," and novelist Kurt Vonnegut, from their collaboration, "Like Shaking Hands with God: A Conversation About Writing." (Rocky Sullivan's, 129 Lexington Ave., at 29th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 7: By poets Mei-mei Berssenbrugge and Forest Gander. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Dec. 13 at 8: By poets Daniel Bouchard and Marcella Durand. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Dec. 13 at 8: By novelists Barbara Gowdy and Sue Miller, from their recent work. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Talks—Dec. 8 at 6: "Longitude" author Dava Sobel talks about her latest book, "Galileo's Daughter." (South Street Seaport Museum, South St. at Fulton St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Dec. 14 at 5: Artist Ellen Phelan discusses the human figure. (New York Academy of Art, 111 Franklin St. 966-0300.)

CLASSICAL NOTES: 'TIS THE SEASON



The London-based Gabrieli Consort & Players, directed by Paul McCreesh, have been forging the latest path in the historical-performance movement by presenting seminal musical masterpieces in the contexts for which they were created. Two of their new releases enliven this year's Christmas listening by illuminating German Baroque liturgical traditions. The center of **SCHÜTZ: CHRISTMAS VESPERS** (DG Archiv 289 463 046-2) is that composer's irresistible "Historia der Geburt Jesu Christi," but it's only the core of a Vespers service "as it might have been celebrated at the Court of Dresden, c. 1664" (to use Mr. McCreesh's description, which reflects the musicological guesswork involved). The service includes organ solos, chants, hymns, motets, and a complete Magnificat setting, all captured with breathtaking splendor in Denmark's Roskilde Cathedral. Similarly ear-opening is the ensemble's **BACH: EPIPHANY MASS** (DG Archiv 457 631-2; two CDs) "as it might have been celebrated in St. Thomas, Leipzig, c. 1740." Bach lovers know the composer's F-Major Missa Brevis and his Cantatas No. 65 and No. 180, but who has heard them as pieces of a tightly structured worship service in which everything relates to everything else? Set amid chorale preludes at the organ, hymns sung with lusty fervor by the congregation (sometimes through as many as ten verses), and even a sermon written by Martin Luther (thankfully reduced to six minutes), Bach's music bursts forth with a startling new resonance. Here the performances are split between two churches in Saxony (for technical reasons involving organ tuning), and the soloists, choirs, and instrumentalists all do their part to make this nearly three-hour endeavor not just enriching, but enormously entertaining as well.

Medievalists may find in their stockings not one, but two recorded paeans to St. Nicholas of Patara (or maybe of Patras): in **LA NUIT DE SAINT NICHOLAS** (Arcana A 72), the scholarly groups La Reverdie and I Cantori Gregoriani present a stern service of plainchant (relieved by only one polyphonic organum), while the women's vocal quartet Anonymous 4 displays more variety and whimsy in **LEGENDS OF ST. NICHOLAS** (Harmonia Mundi HMU 907232), which mingles chant and polyphony with period readings. After such earnestness, you might turn to the Toronto Consort, which brings a toe-tapping folk-music sensibility to Renaissance repertoire; on **THE LITTLE BARLEY-CORNE** (Dorian 93186) the group whoops it up with infectious songs relating to the ale-soaked "winter revels." Rarely heard Italian Baroque spiritual dialogues figure on **ANGELS & SHEPHERDS** (Channel Classics CCS 15198), an imaginative program by the distinguished Choir of the Netherlands Bach Society, and **A ROMAN CHRISTMAS** (Naxos 8.551077) offers the Cologne Chamber Orchestra's solid, if old-fashioned, interpretations of Italian cantatas and concertos of a pastoral persuasion (with some boffo oboe-playing by Stefan Schilli). An unexpected treat lurks in **JOSEPH EYBLER'S CHRISTMAS ORATORIO** (CPO 999 667-2), worthily championed by Wolfgang Helbich and an assemblage of capable musicians. A Mozart protégé, Eybler (1765-1846) learned his mentor's tricks so well that his charming succession of angels, shepherds, and wise men often sound as if they've just popped in from "Die Zauberflöte." Finally, the best of this year's inevitable crop of opera-star holiday disks is **HOME FOR CHRISTMAS** (DG 289 459 685-2), with mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter and a group of her fellow Swedes; fine efforts outweigh patently unsuccessful ones in this collection, and her tender performance of the English lute song "Sweet Was the Song" is as good as Christmas singing gets.

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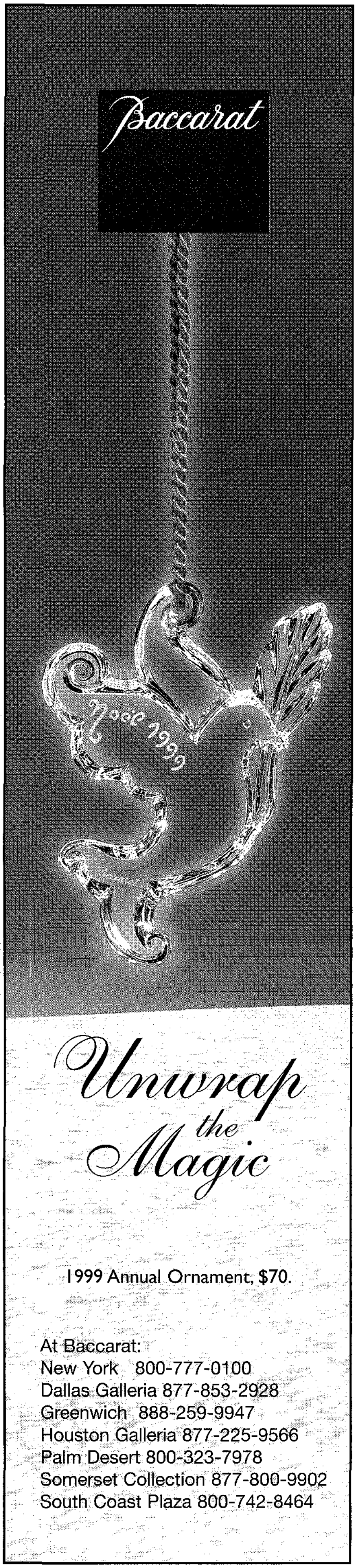

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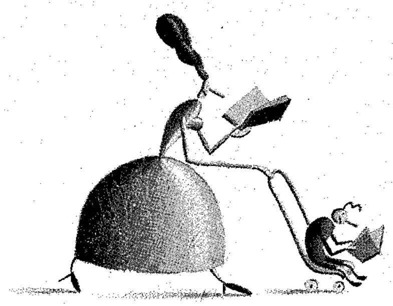
The Children's Hour



As parents dutifully troop out to buy Pokémon presents this Christmas, they may fret about the difficulties of getting their children interested in plain old-fashioned books. Humor and fantasy are reliably popular, though, and one of this year's most zanily inventive examples is **Tough Cookie**, by David Wisniewski (Lothrop). Our guide, a tough-talking cookie gumshoe, shows us around a cookie jar that looks like the Gotham of film noir. From swell "store-bought" cookies living "Upjar" to the "crumbs" who eke out an existence at the Bottom, it's a world where "Life's still sweet. Just a little stale," and where everyone is prey to the random attacks of "The Fingers." The cookie mix is nicely leavened with jokes to keep adults amused, too. This is also true of **Swine Lake**, by the late James Marshall (Harper Collins), which tells of a mangy old wolf (deliciously down at the heels in Maurice Sendak's illustrations) who goes to a pigs' ballet hoping to feast on well-toned porcine flesh. But as the drama onstage unfolds he is so transported that he reforms and emerges as a lupine balletomane. Kids will be amused, though possibly not converted to ballet, just yet.

Underneath the fun, the covert intention of most kid's books is to educate. In **I Love You, Blue Kangaroo!**, by Emma Chichester Clark (Doubleday), a girl who takes her cuddly kangaroo to bed each night is given more and more soft toys by visiting relatives. Every night she says "I love you" to each in turn, but Blue Kangaroo is losing sleep and sees the writing on the wall. One night, supplanted by no fewer than seven others, he falls out of bed and walks despondently away. But when Lily sees her little brother playing with him the next day, she throws a tantrum and exchanges all the other toys to get him back. It's a winning tale of infantile possessiveness, and may also surreptitiously reassure any child traumatized by the arrival of a younger sibling.

The trauma of moving to a new house underpins **The Best Place**, by Susan Meddaugh (Houghton Mifflin). A wolf who loves nothing more than watching the world from his screen porch starts to regret not having travelled more, so he sells his house and begins a world tour. Finding every place he visits intolerable, he goes back, but the family he sold to won't move, and he scares the entire neighborhood with a temper tantrum. **Tea with Milk**, by Allen Say (Houghton Mifflin), also focusses on an upsetting move. May grows up in California, but her Japanese parents miss home, and the family moves back when she finishes high school. Now May is called Masako; now *she* is the homesick foreigner. Frustrated, she gets a job in Osaka, where she meets her future husband, a young Japanese man with a Western background who also takes his tea with milk and sugar.

Embarrassment is the bugbear in Marc Brown's **Arthur's Underwear** (Little, Brown). After laughing at a friend who rips his trousers at school, Arthur suffers recurrent nightmares of trouserlessness. His phobia is cured when his trousers really do rip one day in front of derisive schoolmates. Embarrassments are unavoidable, it turns out, and you're still the same person "with or without your trousers." In **My Man Blue**, by Nikki Grimes and Jerome Lagarrigue (Dial), Damon has grimmer lessons to learn. He's just moved with his mom to a rough part of the city. In a sequence of poems we meet Blue, the tough-looking but kindly man who becomes a surrogate father, teaching Damon a kind of streetwise decency. The terse poems, with shades of both rap and blank verse, powerfully evoke a world where trust is given slowly and doing the right thing is seldom simple.

Some books, of course, have no message at all. (These are likely to be the ones you remember most as an adult.) In Alexandra Day's **Boswell Wide Awake** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a young bear awoken by the full moon gets out of bed and pads around the sleeping household. He doesn't do anything very special—pets the cat, eats a snack, whispers good night to his parents—but the splendid illustrations of the eerily moonlit night provide a haunting picture of one of those solitary adventures through which children observe their world—and start growing up.

—Leo Carey

MARTIN JARRIE

Books.
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Holiday Gifts That Are Always in Style

THE HEDGIE GIFT BOX

by Jan Brett

When Lisa's winter sock blows off the clothesline and sticks onto a hedgehog's head, all the farm animals discover a very amusing way to stay warm. *The Hat* board book, packaged with a soft and furry Hedgie doll, makes an irresistible gift for little ones.
(Putnam)

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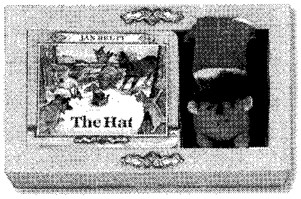

THE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL ELOISE

by Kay Thompson, illustrated by Hilary Knight

Everyone knows Eloise—the little girl who wreaks hilarious havoc on New York City's Plaza Hotel, where she lives with her nanny, her dog Weenie, and her pet turtle. In this brand new edition, Eloise's adventure is enhanced by a special scrapbook of photos and drawings.
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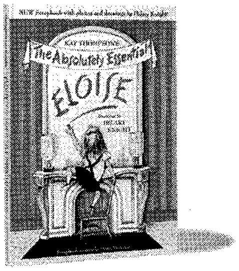

GINGERBREAD BABY

by Jan Brett

When Matti peeks inside the baking oven too soon, the Gingerbread Baby hops out and gives chase all around his tiny Swiss village. Jan Brett's elaborate illustrations and humorous verse put a charming new twist on a familiar seasonal favorite.
(Putnam)

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JAN BRETT
Gingerbread Baby

ELOISE IN PARIS

by Kay Thompson, illustrated by Hilary Knight

When her jet-setter mother beckons from Paris, who else but the precocious Eloise would have passport photos taken by Richard Avedon? Or have her clothing designed by Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent?
(Simon & Schuster's Children's Publishing)

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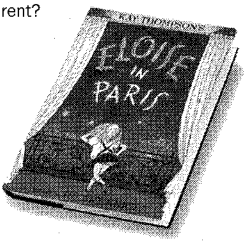

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

by Clement C. Moore, illustrated by Jan Brett

Trademark illustrated borders from the creator of *The Hat*, *The Mitten* and *The Wild Christmas Reindeer* adorn this edition of Clement C. Moore's classic yuletide poem about St. Nick's visit. The perfect addition to every family's bookshelf.
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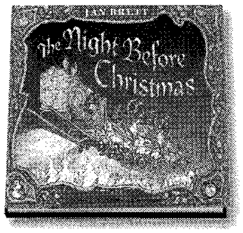

ELOISE AT CHRISTMASTIME

by Kay Thompson, illustrated by Hilary Knight

Eloise takes New York by storm in a sparkling holiday adventure. Back in print after almost forty years, this charming edition includes new pictures and cover art by revered illustrator Hilary Knight.
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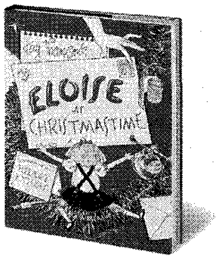

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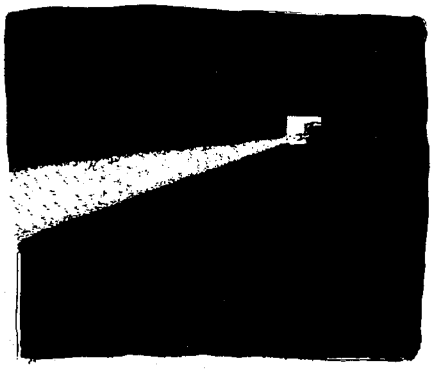
THE MOVIES



OPENING

The Cider House Rules—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 10. (Angelika Film Center, Gotham Cinema, and Lincoln Square.)

Cradle Will Rock—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 10.

Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo—A lowly fish-tank cleaner (Rob Schneider) blunders into a career as an international male escort in this comedy directed by Mike Mitchell. Opening Dec. 10.

Diamonds—Kirk Douglas plays an elderly ex-boxer who leads his son and grandson across Nevada on a quest for lost diamonds. With Lauren Bacall and Jenny McCarthy. Directed by John Asher. Opening Dec. 10. (Cinema I.)

The Green Mile—A prison guard (Tom Hanks) discovers that one of the death-row inmates (Michael Clarke Duncan) possesses mysterious healing powers. Written, directed, and produced by Frank Darabont. Based on the serialized novel by Stephen King. Opening Dec. 10.

Miss Julie—An adaptation of Strindberg's play, with Saffron Burrows and Peter Mullan. Directed by Mike Figgis. Opening Dec. 10. (Angelika Film Center and First & 62nd Cinemas.)

Wallowitch & Ross—A documentary chronicling the thirty-year relationship of John Wallowitch and Bertram Ross, who were both lovers and cabaret partners. Directed by Richard Morris. (Cinema Village.)

The War Zone—Tim Roth's directorial début is a story about incest set in Devon, England. Opening Dec. 10. (Union Square.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Anywhere But Here—Wayne Wang, the director of "The Joy Luck Club," has made another picture that feels proudly bereft of men. A few of them get walk-on parts as dopes or turncoats, but most of the space is occupied by Adele August (Susan Sarandon) and her teen-age daughter, Ann (Natalie Portman). The two of them leave a settled life in Wisconsin and head for the riskier pleasures of Los Angeles, where the bulk of their relationship is consumed by arguments about their relationship; for a movie about escape, it seems dangerously trapped in its own predicament. Portman's portrait of grave and lovely bafflement, however, may be the best work she's done.—*Anthony Lane* (11/15/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, 59th Street East Cinema, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 62nd & Broadway.)

Being John Malkovich—An out-of-work puppeteer (John Cusack) and his pet-loving girlfriend (Cameron Diaz) take turns entering the head of the actor John Malkovich, where they remain for fifteen minutes at a time, experiencing everything he does, before being deposited with a whoosh beside the New Jersey Turnpike. This fantastic weightless comedy, which was written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, plays with notions of celebrity worship and gender reversal, but the best thing about it is the genially deadpan style of its most absurd inventions.—*David Denby* (11/22/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

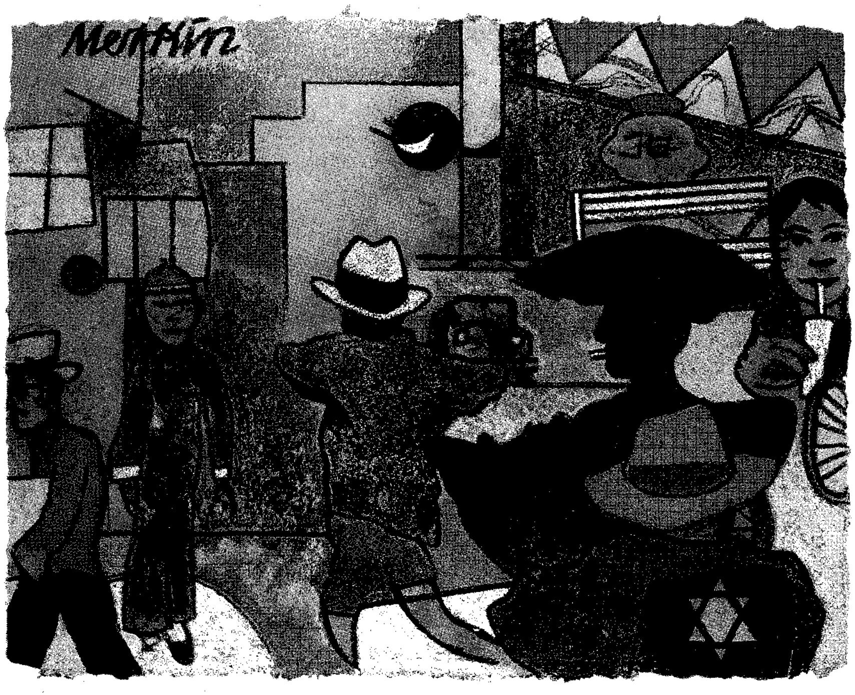
Brazil (1985)—Terry Gilliam's retro-futurist fantasy—a melancholy, joke-ridden view of the horribleness of where we are now and the worse horribleness of where we're heading. It's like a stoned, slapstick "1984," a nightmare comedy in which the comedy is just an aspect of the nightmarishness. Visually, it's an original, bravura piece of moviemaking, with a weirdly ingenious verticality: the camera always seems to be moving up and down, rarely across. You get the feeling that people live and work squashed at the bottom of hollow towers. The clothes, like the furnishings and the ancient TV sets and assorted gadgetry, suggest that nothing has been made or manufactured since the forties. It's a thrift-shop world of the future. The central character (Jonathan Pryce) is a lowly clerk, a drone; in pursuit of the girl (Kim Greist) he has glimpsed in his dreams, he runs afoul of the state apparatus, and there's a super-realistic inevitability about this. The episodes lack dramatic definition, just as the gags do; they all run together and blur. Yet Gilliam's vision is an organic thing on the screen—and that's a considerable achievement.—*Pauline Kael* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Dec. 4.)

Dogma—Kevin Smith, lord of the zero budget ("Clerks," "Chasing Amy"), has decided to stretch himself with this sprawling, star-stuffed fantasy on the trifling theme of good and evil. His unlikely plot features Matt Damon and Ben Affleck as a couple of renegade angels who spot a chance to reënter heaven and thus terminate the universe. Up against them is a rank of supernatural forces—played by Alan Rickman, Chris Rock, Jason Lee, and Selma Hayek—a perplexed earthling (Linda Fiorentino), and a couple of unwitting prophets, played by the grungy Jason Mewes and the bearded Smith himself, back by popular demand from his previous pictures. The result has some great lines, but it's a muddle that turns into a mess; there have been cries of distress about the film's attack on organized religion, but no self-respecting church could seriously claim to be damaged by this extended skit. With Alanis Morissette as God.—*A.L.* (11/15/99) (Art Greenwich Twin, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

The End of the Affair—Adultery during the blitz, with rain and gray ash everywhere and buildings falling down around the furtive lovers. Neil Jordan's adaptation of Graham Greene's novel "The End of the Affair" is suitably intense and sombre. The picture has an arrowlike swiftness and seriousness, and a good part of Greene's intelligence and candor come through. But Greene's story, by its very nature, cannot explode into dramatic life on the screen. The principal players are the writer Maurice Bendrix (Ralph Fiennes), a stand-in for Greene himself; a married woman, Sarah (Julianne Moore); and God, who is ever so hard to cast. Bendrix addresses Him, with elababorate loathing, and Sarah needs Him, but exactly what faith means to her is a mystery. The movie is constructed like a puzzle with a metaphysical solution—it's intelligent but muffled and slightly remote. Stephen Rea gives an abashed, beautiful performance as the cuckolded husband, and Ian Hart is the Dickensian detective who spies on everyone.—*D.D.* (12/6/99) (Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

End of Days—The trailers looked like trouble, and they didn't lie. Arnold Schwarzenegger's millennial "Omen" flick—the Devil comes to New York to mate with a virgin on New Year's Eve—looks and plays like leftover high-testosterone eighties filmmaking. There's nothing here that breaks any new action ground, and the performance by Gabriel Byrne as the Prince of Darkness (his dialogue and strange accent make him sound like he's doing a Henny Youngman shtick) is embarassing. When Schwarzenegger throws down his guns (always a bad sign) and figures out that faith, not bullets, destroys evil, there's little to do but wait for some enlightenment. It never comes.—*Bruce Diones* (Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, Waverly I and II, and Ziegfeld.)

Flawless—Robert De Niro plays a homophobic ex-security guard and stroke victim who's forced to take singing lessons from a lonely, flamboyant drag-queen neighbor, played by Philip Seymour Hoffman, in director Joel Schumacher's bizarre idea of dramatic entertainment. While the



At Anthology Film Archives, "The Port of Last Resort."

RICHARD MERKIN

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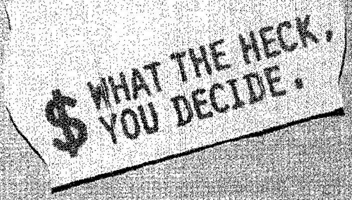

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actors do a good job portraying characters that are borderline stereotypes, not much can be done with a script that is peppered with we're-all-in-this-together cheerleading and banal setups (Hoffman teaches music to pay for a sex-change operation). By the time menacing drug dealers are introduced (don't ask) and the bullets fly, both men will have to learn to live and love without judgment. The film should come with a group-hug warning.—*B.D.* (East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Insider—A self-important but juicily entertaining public-affairs melodrama about big-time journalism and corporate villainy. Russell Crowe plays the real-life whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand, who in 1995 had devastating things to reveal about his former employer, tobacco giant Brown & Williamson, and Al Pacino is the bristling "60 Minutes" producer Lowell Bergman, who was stymied in bringing Wigand's information to the public. They are meant to represent two kinds of personal honor arrayed against corporate game-players, including Michael Gambon as a tobacco executive and Christopher Plummer as a mildly satirized Mike Wallace. Director Michael Mann creates a rising line of tension and paranoia which leads to a muted, not entirely reassuring ending.—*D.D.* (11/8/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, State, and Union Square.)

Liberty Heights—The new Barry Levinson movie is set in Baltimore, and that alone should raise the hopes of his fans. As in "Diner" (still his finest hour), Levinson orchestrates events, and rueful nonevents, with the relaxed air of a man who is completely sure of the ground beneath his feet. The time is the fall of 1954, the place is the working-class Jewish neighborhood, and all is not well in the Kurtzman family: young Ben (Ben Foster) is falling for the radiant Sylvia (Rebekah Johnson), a black girl in his class. To Ben's mother (Bebe Neuwirth), this is a personal insult, although his father (Joe Mantegna) is too busy running a numbers racket out of his burlesque theatre to take much notice. At the same time, their older son, Van (Adrien Brody), is pursuing an icy Wasp goddess (Carolyn Murphy) with gratifying success. This sneaky breaching of cultural and ethnic frontiers is Levinson's favorite theme; he finds comic alliances where other directors would sniff for confrontation, and he skillfully avoids the traps of sentimental softness. If the picture has a lesson to impart, it is that, for postwar believers, only one religion was solemn enough to be beyond a joke, and that was the cult of Frank Sinatra.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

Mansfield Park—It's Jane Austen, but not as we know it. Aware, perhaps, that this is one of the sterner and less loved of the novels, the director and screenwriter Patricia Rozema has taken shameless liberties and encouraged her actors to do the same. The plot is simplified but intact: impoverished Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor) is brought to live with her wealthier relations, among them Sir Thomas Bertram (Harold Pinter) and his son Edmund (Jonny Lee Miller). Their lives are churned up by the arrival of the dashing Crawfords—Henry (Alessandro Nivola) and Mary (Embeth Davidtz), both of whom have various designs upon Fanny. Everyone in this movie seems to fancy everyone else: how very different from the home life of the late Miss Austen. We even get a bouncy nude scene and lots of filthy secrets about slave trading. Yet the picture, however willful, has a welcome audacity and a hard, discomforting look that dispels the plushness of ordinary costume drama. Best of all, Rozema's version of Fanny, tricked out with elements from Austen's own letters, is more of a sport than the original.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

Pokémon: The First Movie—Nintendo's hugely popular pocket-monster game has been turned into a highly effective and very entertaining kiddie flick. The plot has a boy named Ash trying to prevent the cloning of a Pokémon and save his faithful companion, Pikachu. There's more to the storytelling than that, though, since the Pokémon world is far more baroque than you'd expect from such a cartoon phenomenon. It aims for an almost mythological fantasyland with a depth that such earlier kiddie blockbusters as the Power Rangers and the Ninja Turtles never aspired to.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, 59th Street East Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, State, and Union Square.)

At Film Forum, "Wisconsin Death Trip."

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

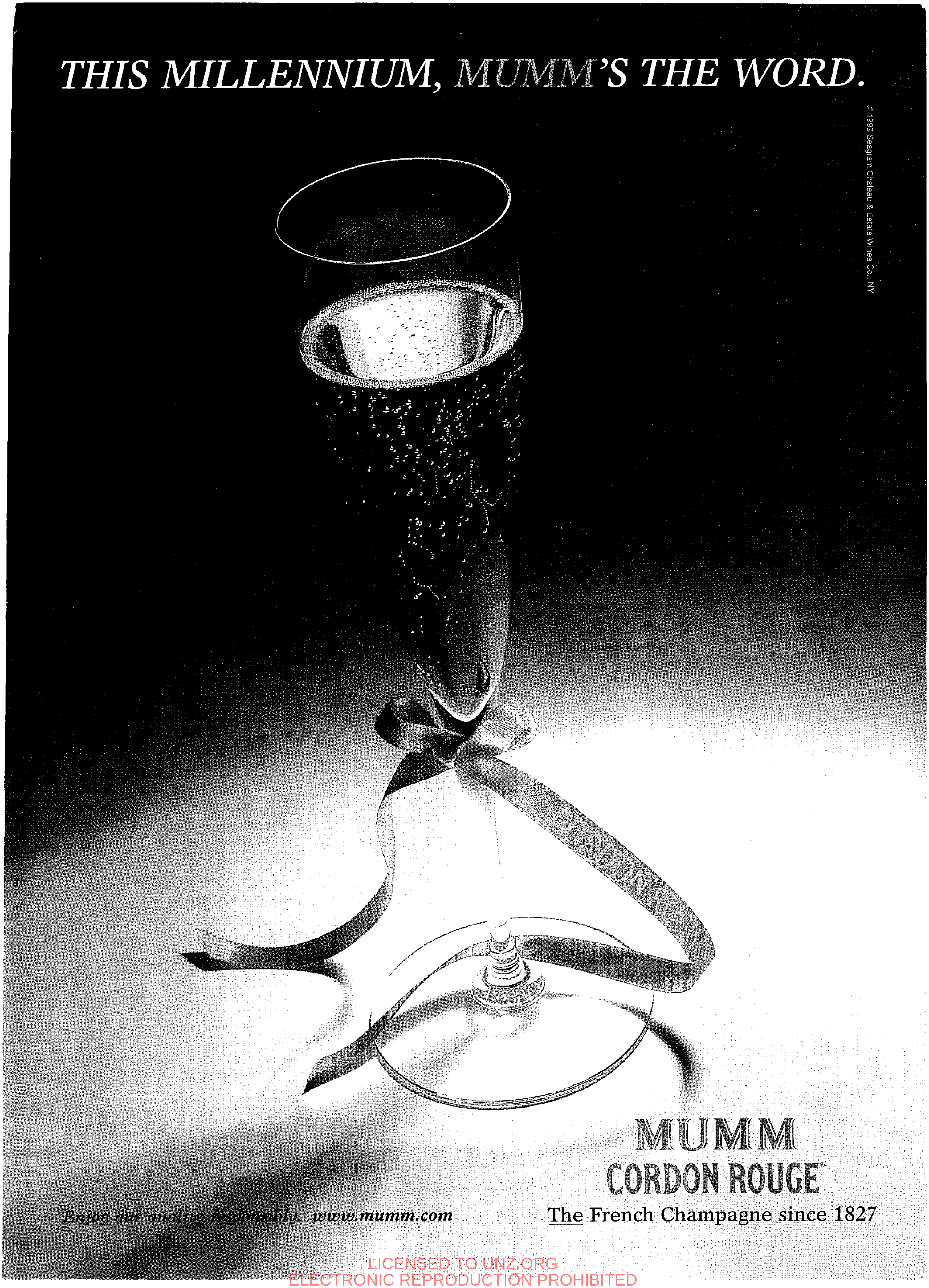
Ride with the Devil—Ang Lee has become one of the most solid and stately of directors, but it's hard to predict where he'll turn next. After "Sense and Sensibility" and the East Coast neuroses of "The Ice Storm," he has shifted his attention to the Kansas-Missouri border during the Civil War. Two young friends (Skeet Ulrich and Tobey Maguire) are caught up in the rough edges of the conflict; instead of grand campaigns, we get woodland skirmishes and deceitful ambushes, and an uneasy sense that the moral advantage is constantly changing hands. Confronted for the first time with action scenes, Lee acquits himself honorably, and his uncanny feel for the moodiness of landscape remains undimmed; the slow domestication of the movie, with the values of home restored, is nicely handled, and yet it seems like a letdown after the awkward perils that prevailed before. The cast is also a touch underpowered; this is a film about young men in deep trouble, but they look more blanked out than coarsened by their plight. With Jeffrey Wright as a trusty servant and Jewel, the pop star, making a fine début as a lusty widow. Thankfully, she waits until the credits before bursting into song.—*A.L.* (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

Shampoo (1975)—This sex roundelay, directed by Hal Ashby, is set in a period as clearly defined as the Jazz Age—the time of the Beatles and miniskirts and strobe lights. When George (Warren Beatty), the hairdresser hero, asks his former girlfriend, Jackie (Julie Christie), "Want me to do your hair?," it's his love lyric. When George gets his hands in a woman's hair, it's practically sex, and sensuous, tender sex—not what his Beverly Hills customers are used to. The film opens on Election Eve, 1968, and ends the day after Nixon and Agnew's victory; it deals with George's frantic bed-hopping during those forty-odd hours, in which he tries to borrow the money to open his own shop, so he can settle down with his current girlfriend, Jill (Goldie Hawn). The script by Robert Towne, with the collaboration of Beatty (who also produced), isn't about the bondage of romantic pursuit—it's about the bondage of the universal itch among a group primed to scratch.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Dec. 9.)

Sleepy Hollow—Tim Burton's retelling of Washington Irving's old tale is impressively sinister—the light is invariably a sombre, chill gray; foul mists, like a spreading poison, envelop the streets and houses. But, like any stylized look that lacks sufficient human interest, the atmosphere of "Sleepy Hollow" grows monotonous. Johnny Depp is charming but weightless as Ichabod Crane, rationalist seeker of truth. The other characters—men with pale, pinched faces in frock coats and wigs, women in Empire-style gowns with corseted breasts—make stunning first impressions, but then they start talking gibberish and we lose interest.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

Sunday Bloody Sunday (1971)—John Schlesinger directed this complex, remarkably modulated English movie about three Londoners and the breakup of two love affairs, from a delicate, pungent screenplay by Penelope Gilliatt, and it may be his finest work. A homosexual doctor in his forties, played by Peter Finch, and an employment counsellor in her thirties, played by Glenda Jackson, are both in love with a boyish, successful kinetic sculptor, played by Murray Head, who casually divides his time and affections between them. He has no special sexual preferences and doesn't understand what upsets the two older people about sharing him, since he loves them both. The film is a curious sort of plea on behalf of human frailty—it asks for sympathy for the non-heroes of life who make the best deal they can. Schlesinger has a gift for pacing and the energy to bring all the elements of a movie together, but he uses his technique so that it's just about impossible for you to have any reaction that he hasn't decreed you should.—*P.K.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 9.)

Sweet and Lowdown—Sean Penn, in cream-colored suits and matching hat, a cigarette dangling from his lips, gives one of the best performances ever seen in a Woody Allen film. He plays Emmet Ray, the notorious (and made-up) jazz guitarist from the thirties, a great artist who was also a worm and a loser. Emmet handles his instrument almost as well as his idol Django Reinhardt, but he's the victim of his own neuroses and obsessions. His not knowing himself at all is turned into a joke, but it's also played for pathos—incomprehension is Emmet's soulfulness, mysteriously linked to his elegant playing. The picture is made up of short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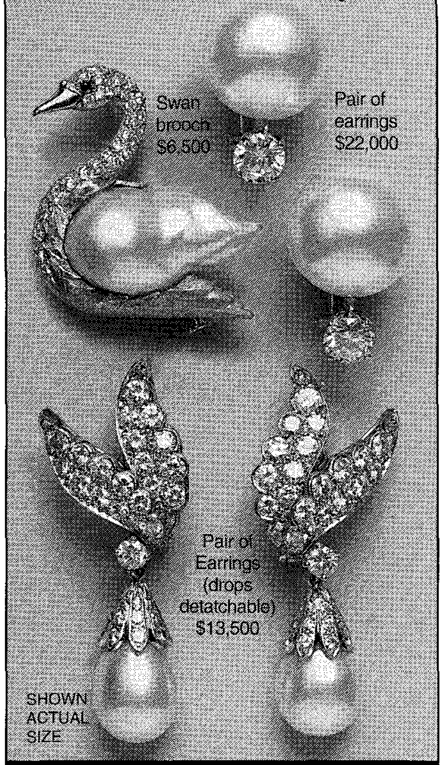

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vignettes framed by "memories" of Emmet spoken by various experts, including Allen himself, and the entire movie is caught in the loving grip of jazz-world nostalgia, with its stylized glamour of thirties clothes and cars—the tawdry life on the road, in which the greatest art was made on the run. With the English actress Samantha Morton, hatted and crumpet-faced, her body hidden in a shapeless dress, as the mute girl who falls for Emmet. Golden-hued cinematography by Zhao Fei. The contemporary guitarists Howard Alden and Bucky Pizzarelli do the playing. In all, one of Allen's finest achievements.—*D.D.* (12/6/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Toy Story 2—A rarity—a sequel that's better than the original. Director John Lasseter's computer filmmaking techniques have broken some new technological ground since his original 1995 smash. His achievement is a stunning marriage of gorgeous detail work (bright and textured backgrounds that evoke the same sense of wonder that made "A Bug's Life" so beautiful) and computer-generated characters with remarkably lively features. To this accomplishment he's added some crackerjack storytelling, filled with action and lighthearted humor, which sets this film apart from many previous computer-animated features. The premise of the film—what happens to old toys when children don't want them anymore—gives Lasseter plenty of leeway to take his characters beyond the children's room and into a breathtakingly alive adult world. The rousing action scenes and the emotional drive of the characters (there's much said about friendship and loyalty) would make anybody weaned on Spielberg cry for joy.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.)

Tumbleweeds—The camera is relaxed, moving with the characters, but still the great English actress Janet McTeer, in her first major film performance, bursts the frame with her vitality. This actress has more body, bigger eyes, a freer laugh—more soul, too—than we are used to seeing in movies. Her Mary Jo, a slightly frayed Southern working-class beauty, depends on her ability to attract men. Nothing else has ever really worked for her, but when she jumps into relationships, she's too honest to keep her mouth shut, and soon she has to jump out of them, dragging her little daughter (Kimberly Brown) along with her. Mary Jo is lovable but exasperating, and the mixed feelings she promotes make the movie continuously exciting. A small picture, but a fully felt one. Written by Angela Shelton and Gavin O'Connor, who also plays Mary Jo's irritable boyfriend and directs, with an easy hand.—*D.D.* (Union Square.)

The World Is Not Enough—The British director Michael Apted has made "Gorillas in the Mist," "Coal Miner's Daughter," and the acclaimed documentary series that began with "7 Up." No wonder the producers picked him for the new James Bond project; next time they hope to get Werner Herzog or the Farrelly Brothers. You can just about spot the Apted style in the midst of the mayhem, but you have to look carefully; there are only so many ways in which a director can fiddle with the Bond formula. Once again, 007 (Pierce Brosnan) is called upon to save the world's natural resources; environmental viewers everywhere will applaud his efforts to save a Turkish oil pipeline. With him is Dr. Christmas Jones (Denise Richards), who is big in warheads; against him is an unstable skinhead called Renard (Robert Carlyle); underneath him is Elektra King (Sophie Marceau), a shady billionairess. Much of the movie is airless and oddly muddled; the opening quarter of an hour, however, which surges into a London boat chase, provides as much fun as you can legally have in a public place.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

ALSO PLAYING

AGNES BROWNE: Coronet Cinemas. . . . **ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER** (11/22/99): Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **AMERICAN BEAUTY** (9/20/99): Beekman, Kips Bay Theatres, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **AMERICAN MOVIE:** Film Forum. . . . **THE BACHELOR:** Criterion Center. . . . **THE BEST MAN:** Chelsea Cinemas and Criterion Center. . . . **THE BONE COLLECTOR:** Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **BOYS DON'T CRY** (10/18-25/99): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square. . . . **BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB:** Screening Room. . . . **CARTOON NOIR:** Cinema Village. . . . **FELICIA'S JOURNEY:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **FIGHT CLUB** (10/18-25/99): Criterion Center and Union Square. . . . **HELL'S KITCHEN:** Criterion Center and Village East Cinemas. . . . **HOLY SMOKE:** Lincoln Square. . . . **LAST NIGHT:** Cinema Village. . . . **THE LIMEY** (10/11/99): Angelika Film Center and Cinema 3rd Avenue. . . . **LOLA AND BILLY THE KID:** Quad Cinema. . . . **A MAP OF THE WORLD:** Cinema II. . . . **THE MESSENGER: THE STORY OF JOAN OF ARC:** Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, and 19th Street

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. neat 8th Ave.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
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East 6. . . . **A MOMENT OF INNOCENCE:** Cinema Village. . . . **PRINCESS MONONOKE:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **ROSETTA** (11/8/99): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. . . . **SPANISH FLY:** Art Greenwich Twin. . . . **STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE** (5/24/99): 64th and 2nd and Village East Cinemas. . . . **THE STRAIGHT STORY** (11/1/99): American Museum of the Moving Image, Eastside Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **2 BY 4:** Quad Cinema. . . . **VIRTUAL SEXUALITY:** First and 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A series of films connected to or inspired by *The New Yorker.* Dec. 8 at 1, 5:15, and 9:30: "The Red Badge of Courage" (1951, John Huston). . . . Dec. 8 at 2:30 and 6:45: "In Cold Blood" (1967, Richard Brooks). . . . Dec. 9 at 1 and 6: "Sunday Bloody Sunday" (†). . . . Dec. 9 at 3:30 and 8:30: "Casualties of War" (1989, Brian de Palma). . . . ¶ Through Dec. 24: A series of contemporary Spanish films.

FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films celebrating Columbia Pictures' seventy-fifth anniversary. Dec. 8: "Murder by Contract " (1958, Irving Lerner) and "City of Fear" (1959, Lerner). . . . Dec. 9: "The Crimson Kimono" (1959, Sam Fuller) and "Underworld U.S.A." (1961, Fuller). . . . Dec. 10-11: "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice" (1969, Paul Mazursky) and "Shampoo" (†). . . . Dec. 12: "Only Angels Have Wings" (1939, Howard Hawks) and "The Last Hurrah" (1958, John Ford). . . . Dec. 13: "She Married Her Boss" (1935, Gregory LaCava) and "Too Many Husbands" (1940, Wesley Ruggles). . . . Dec. 14: "Bite the Bullet" (1975, Richard Brooks) and "The Horsemen" (1971, John Frankenheimer). . . . ¶ From Dec. 8: "Wisconsin Death Trip" (James Marsh).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Dec. 9 at 6: "Big as Life 1999: Moving Out," a retrospective of films made with 8-mm. technology. . . . ¶ Through Dec. 19: A program of films representing recent work from the independent states of the former Soviet Union. . . . ¶ A program of silent films, 1893 to 1928, from the museum's collection. Dec. 9 at 3 and Dec. 12 at 2: "Jubilo" (1919, Clarence Badger). . . . Dec 11 at 2: "Coeur Fidèle" (1923, Jean Epstein). . . . Dec. 12 at 5: "Prästäkan" (1920, Carl Dreyer; with Swedish intertitles and live translation). . . . Dec. 14 at 2:30: "Anna Christie" (1923, John Griffith Wray). . . . ¶ A presentation of independent documentaries. Dec. 9 at 6:30 and Dec. 10 at 3: "Regret to Inform" (1998, Barbara Sonneborn).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Jan. 30: "Andy's Funhouse: The Andy Kaufman Special" (1979). (Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 1, Thursdays at 6, Fridays at 7, and Saturdays and Sundays at 1.)

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—From Dec. 9: "The Port of Last Resort" (1998, Joan Grossman and Paul Rosdy) and "Memory of Berlin" (1998, John Burgan).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Dec. 8: "Hangover Square" (1945, John Brahm). . . . Dec. 9: "Pulp Fiction" (1994, Quentin Tarantino). . . . Dec. 10: "A Fistful of Dollars" (1964, Sergio Leone). . . . Dec. 11: "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (1939, William Dieterle). . . . Dec. 12: "The Private Life of Henry VIII" (1933, Alexander Korda). . . . Dec. 13: "Broadway Bill" (1934, Frank Capra). . . . Dec. 14: "Amarcord" (1974, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Films about the future. Dec. 11 at 1:30: "Metropolis" (1927, Fritz Lang) and Dec. 11 at 4: "Brazil" (†). . . . Dec. 12 at 4: "Blade Runner—The Director's Cut" (1982, Ridley Scott).

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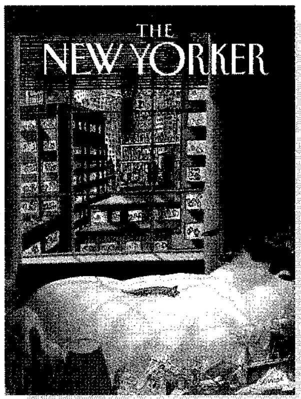

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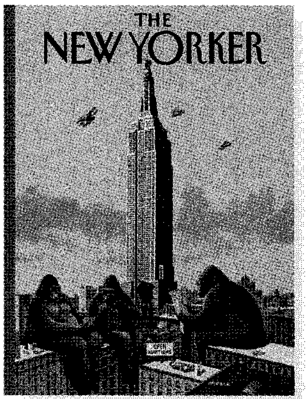

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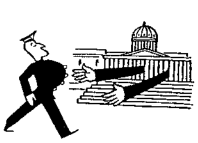
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

Vietnam as political dodgeball.



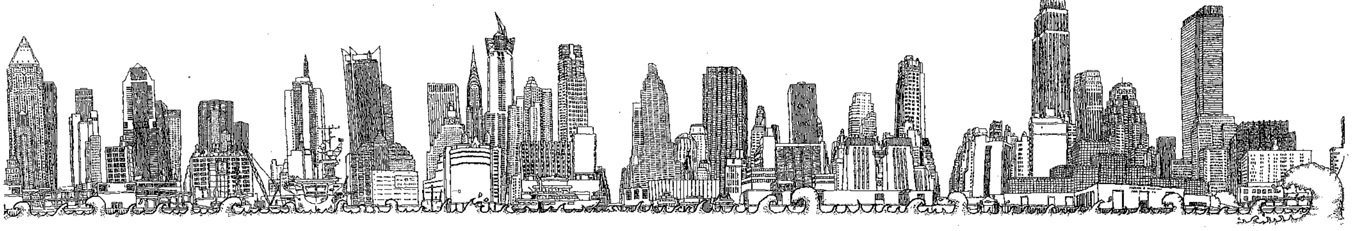
IN the weirdly tranquil political atmosphere generated by the waning months of the post-impeachment Clinton Administration and the post-Gingrich Republican Congress, the Presidential campaign is at last tiptoeing toward its sorting-out phase. In the absence of urgent crises or bitter contentions, the candidates huddle around the safe center like Boy Scouts around a campfire. In these circumstances, attention drifts toward questions of, for want of a better word, character. This time, though, the interest in character is not merely a pretext for an interest in sex. That's something to be thankful for, even if the thanks are due mainly to a lack of raw material. The political community, deprived of dope on how the candidates make love, has turned to how they made war.

The campaign of 2000 will be the first since 1948 in which the nominee of neither party is a veteran of the Second World War. All of the candidates were of military age during the Vietnam era. How they responded to the choices that Vietnam presented cannot fail to be instructive. Militarily, the six also-runners—the Republicans Gary Bauer, Steve Forbes, Alan Keyes, and Orrin Hatch, the ex-Republican Pat Buchanan, and the solipsist Donald Trump—are a pretty sorry bunch. Forbes did weekends in the New Jersey National Guard as a cook and baker; the rest simply gave Uncle Sam a miss. But the four candidates from whose number the next President is sure to emerge served, and served honorably. Still, distinctions can be drawn. Bill Bradley, George W. Bush, and Al Gore all made their decisions about military service with public office in mind; they wished to maintain their political viability within the system, one might say. In varying but perfectly lawful ways, Bradley and Bush used their privileged status to find positions as commissioned officers in, respectively, the Air Force Reserves and the Texas Air National Guard—billets whose main attraction was a virtual guarantee that service in the war zone would not be among their duties. Gore joined the Army and spent five months in Vietnam as a private.

Gore's critics have made much of the facts that his tour in Vietnam was less than half as long as the usual one-year stint, that he went there (in the words of one commentator) "as a reporter, not as a combatant," and that, without his knowledge, the commanding general of his unit asked a sergeant to look out for his safety. And it is true that Gore was in less danger than many of his fellow-soldiers. But he carried a rifle as well as a notebook, and, crisscrossing the country in low-flying helicopters and camping in foxholes within range of enemy artillery, he was in more danger than anyone in Texas or New Jersey.

John McCain is a special case. His decision to serve had nothing to do with Vietnam, politics, or the draft; it was hardly a decision at all. There was never any doubt that, as the son and grandson of admirals, he would serve in the Navy. And that is what he did, for twenty-two years, beginning in 1954 as a nineteen-year-old plebe at Annapolis. By the time he was shot down over Hanoi, in 1967, he was a seasoned officer, while the worst of the bitterness the war would engender at home lay in the future. He is a hero, and the nature of his heroic ordeal—five and a half years of torture, isolation, despair, introspection, and defiance—is a nice metaphor for a war prosecuted amid doubt and concluded without triumph. If, like Gore and Bush, McCain had come of age a dark decade later, his life might have taken a quite different course. He seems to understand how contingent his fate has been; perhaps that is why he seems to harbor no rancor toward those who protested the war in good faith.

There's another question, less often asked but no less pertinent than "What did you do in the war, Daddy?" It is "What did you do *against* the war,



The lower portion of Matteo Pericoli's "Manhattan Unfurled": Fiftieth Street to the Battery sonny?" After all, the Vietnam War (as distinct from the intentions of those who fought in it) was a catastrophe—a war that could never have been won without inflicting an unthinkable degree of suffering. It was a war worth opposing. By that standard (from which McCain, of course, is exempt), the record merits attention. At the time the three younger men were making their decisions—late 1967 to mid-1969—Bush favored the war, yet he arranged to avoid fighting in it. Bradley neither favored nor opposed it, and his riskless but dutiful military service exactly matched that view. (By 1971, however, he was speaking out against the war.) Gore strongly opposed the war—and that, precisely, was why he volunteered to serve in it. The political viability he enlisted to maintain was less his own than that of his father, an antiwar senator who, in 1970, was up for reëlection in a prowar state. The son's stint in Vietnam was indeed shorter than those of most of his comrades. But that was because his request to go was granted only after his father had been safely defeated, sixteen months into his two-year enlistment.

Thirty years later, Vietnam no longer stirs such passions. Its role in this campaign will be a cameo—helpful to McCain, a little less so to Gore, unperilous to Bush and Bradley. After that, it will be a story from another century.

—HENDRIK HERTZBERG

ON THE WATERFRONT

A New York architect invents a new kind of river view.

When the architect Charles Gwathmey said in a speech at Princeton last month that young architects no longer know how to draw, he obviously wasn't thinking of Matteo Pericoli. Pericoli, a thirty-one-year-old Italian-born architect who works for Richard Meier, draws obsessively. He draws buildings, he draws maps, he draws birds. And last year he drew all of Manhattan.

Well, almost all. He drew the entire West Side of Manhattan, from Spuyten Duyvil to the Battery. Pericoli made a line drawing in black ink of the way the city looks from the Hudson River, and he did it on a single, thirty-seven-foot-long roll of white paper. He started the drawing in May of 1998, working nights and weekends. Until he finished, a year later, he kept the paper rolled up on a table in his apartment, on the Upper West Side, exposing only a few feet at a time. He would draw six or seven blocks, then roll the paper forward, covering what he had just done. He worked like the scribes who write Torah scrolls by hand: he never erased, he never changed anything once he had done it, and he never looked back at his work after he finished a section. He did not see the entire drawing until it was completed.

Pericoli's drawing, which will be on exhibit at the Casa Italiana at New York University until December 24th (the title is "Manhattan Unfurled"), is at once monumental and gentle. In Pericoli's fine lines every building is benign, and together the buildings seem almost to be swaying softly in a chorus line along the Hudson. He wanted to document a view of the city that New Yorkers almost never have, since it is available only from a boat on the Hudson. And Pericoli, who moved to New York from Milan in 1995, knows enough about his adopted city to know that no one from New York ever takes the Circle Line.

The idea, he says, came to him when he was riding his bicycle to work through Riverside Park. "I saw all of these wonderful buildings on Riverside Drive that have such character, and I wanted to draw them," he said. "At first, I thought I would only do a drawing of Riverside Drive. Then one day I decided to go on the Circle Line, and it was a revelation to me. It is the most democratic view—what you see is what you get."

Pericoli realized that he would not be happy unless he drew it all, right down to the Battery. He took two more trips on the Circle Line, standing on the deck and shooting a photograph of the Manhattan riverfront every six or seven blocks. Then, deciding that he needed a broader perspective, he traded in his bicycle for a motorcycle and started going across the river to shoot from up and down the New Jersey waterfront. In all, he took more than four hundred photographs before he was ready to start drawing.

"It is connected to what I do as an architect, the beauty of drawing a line," Pericoli said. "Every building has character; to draw it is like drawing a face, the things that give it soul. If you draw something, it is fixed in your mind forever, it is a miracle."

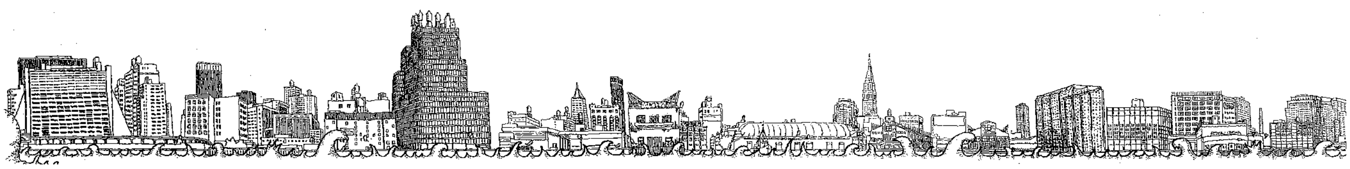
—PAUL GOLDBERGER

THE MUSICAL LIFE

Why the Sugar Plum Fairy is dancing to a recording.

Apart from dancing, nothing is more central to New York City Ballet than its music. Balanchine's ballets were created out of the music; they were about the music. Hence it has long been a source of wonderment that the music at City Ballet is performed so badly. Players come in late; they flub, they flat. Occasionally they seem to be playing these pieces for the first time—pieces that in many cases have been in the repertory for forty or fifty years.

As it turns out, some of the people in the pit may indeed be playing the music for the first time. N.Y.C.B., in its fifty-one years of operation, has never imposed an attendance requirement on the orchestra. Whenever the performers wished, they could take "unpaid leave"—in other words, send in a substitute. (Most of them do outside work. They teach, or they take other playing gigs—shows, weddings, bar mitzvahs.) Eventually, the arrangement got out of hand. Today, according to Christopher Ramsey, the company's director of external affairs, about thirty per cent of



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the players at any performance, and about half at rehearsals, are substitutes.

But today nobody's playing. ("The Nutcracker" is being performed to taped music.) On November 23rd, seven hours before the season's gala opening, the orchestra went out on strike, the reason being that the company had asked the musicians, as part of a new contract, to start showing up for work—specifically, that they attend six out of seven performances, and two out of four rehearsals, per week. The orchestra's union, Local 802, said no, and the company backed down. Instead, it asked that all orchestra members hired in the future—plus any current members who wanted to be bumped to a higher pay level—comply with the new attendance rules. That proposal, too, was rejected. It would divide the orchestra in two, said Judy West, the union's public-relations director: "It makes one group closer to management—they're being paid off." According to Ramsey, the union has since offered a counterproposal, one that, while making certain concessions, still permits forty-per-cent absenteeism.

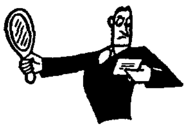
What this system means is that at any given performance or rehearsal about two-fifths of the musicians are not the people whom City Ballet has hired but freelancers looking to make a quick buck. Worse, the person playing second cello at the performance is not necessarily the one who played second cello at rehearsal. (It is common for orchestra members to go to rehearsal and then send a sub to the performance, and vice versa.) West sees no difficulty here. At the rehearsal, she says, the musicians write the conductor's notes on their copies of the score, and at the performance "the conductor is there, to signal what he wants them to do." What, then, is the purpose of rehearsal? When John Gielgud played "Hamlet," did the director rehearse John Doe? Do the Green Bay Packers send their cousins to practice?

Of course, the system disempowers the orchestra's leadership. For a year now, the company has been looking for a new musical director, but it is having a problem, because any self-respecting conductor, at performance time, wants to be looking at the same group of musicians he coached at rehearsal.

"Money is not an issue in this work stoppage," said Howard Solomon, the chairman of N.Y.C.B.'s board, in a letter published in the *Times* last Tuesday. In fact, money is exactly what the strike is about. That's why the players are sending substitutes: they can earn more that night by playing at a wedding. The question here is whether the job for which, according to the company, these musicians are earning an average of sixty-six thousand dollars for half a year's work is their primary job—something for which they have a special, personal responsibility—or whether it is just one of a collection of gigs, and art be damned. —JOAN ACOCELLA

THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

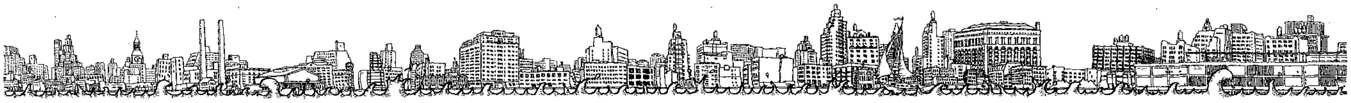
The Republican candidates get a chance to find their feet.



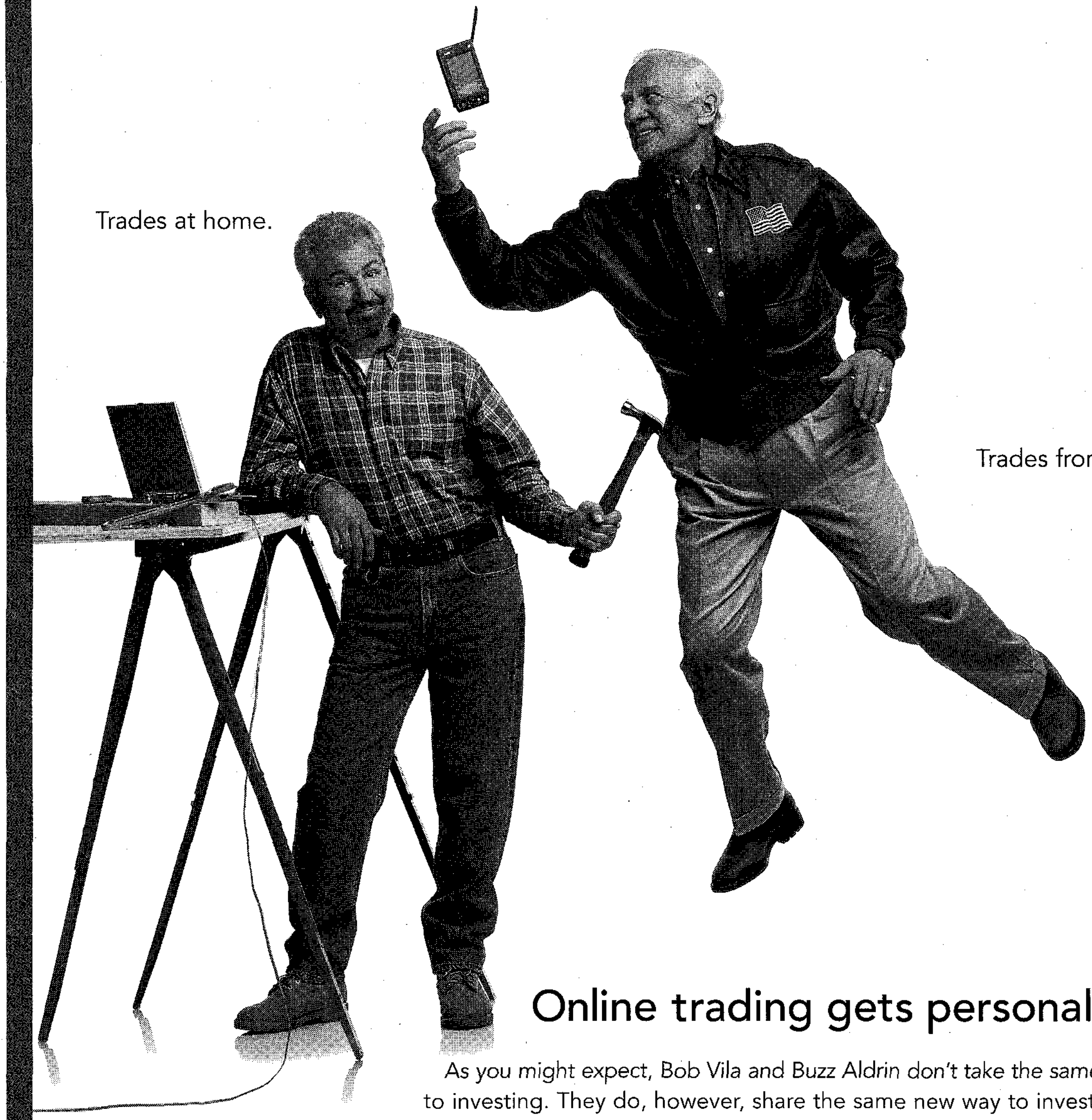
THERE are times when Governor George W. Bush, of Texas, will squinny his eyes, raise his chin, lift an eyebrow, and curl his lips slightly—his face seems to be involved in a somewhat painful, quasi-involuntary struggle to prevent itself from erupting into a broad, self-satisfied smile. This facial skirmish is often accompanied by a slight forward bend at the waist and a what-me-worry? shrug, and they often occur after the Governor has delivered a line particularly well, or thinks he has. It would be easy to mistake such elaborate body language for arrogance, as more than a few observers have, whereas the true meaning of the tic may be the exact opposite. It may just signify relief—that he has successfully managed to jump another public hurdle without embarrassing himself. Or it may mean nothing at all.

But the Bush Smirk has become a factor, of sorts, in the Republican race for the Presidency. It is what people notice about him. In the days before the first debate in which Bush deigned to join Senator John McCain and four Dickensian pretenders on the same stage, observers as diverse as Brian Williams, of MSNBC, and Deborah Orin, of the New York *Post*, cited smirkiness as a problem for Bush to overcome. And it was clear, from the first moments of the debate, that Governor Bush was going to do his best to appear Serious. He spoke in short sentences filled with hearty-beef words. (His tax-cut proposal was a "good, bold, practical plan.") He rarely took all of his allotted time. He did not rise to the bait when his opponents criticized his proposals or when one of the moderators, Brit Hume, asked him, in effect, if he was dumb. What do you read? Hume asked, as if he expected the Governor to admit to studying the backs of cereal boxes. "The newspaper," Bush responded. Which paper? Hume pursued, indelicately. The Dallas *Morning News*. The New York *Times*. The *Wall Street Journal*. The Austin *American-Statesman*. "I'm not so sure I get a lot of knowledge out of there, but I read them every day," Bush added, his face flirting with disaster. And then he insisted that he reads books, too.

Each time the Governor opened his mouth, the roomful of journalists watching the proceedings fell silent, and one imagined Republicans across the country holding their breath: the Bush candidacy remains a wobbly foal. His good performances are barely adequate; he has all the authority of a substitute teacher. This must be enervating for the royalist stalwarts of the Grand Old Party, who have traditionally bestowed their nomination on the most solid, senior commodity available to them—Nixon, Ford, Reagan (but only after several tries), Bush the Elder, Dole the Husband—and let the Democrats take flyers on unknown governors from the Deep South. This year, the process seems to be reversed. The Democrats are assaying two certified grownups, Al Gore and Bill Bradley. And the Republicans have rushed to anoint a candidate who has a familiar name but whom they didn't know very well. "I fear he's Quayle," a very well-known Republican confided the other day. The consternation is multiplied, for many of the Party elders, by



Bob Vila & Buzz Aldrin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Fidelity Brokerage Services, Inc. Member NYSE, SIPC 90165 the sense that the alternatives to Bush are roving vaudevillians—even John McCain, who is passionate and from Arizona, as was the only other Republican who did not win the nomination through primogeniture in the past half century, Barry Goldwater.

McCain, like Bush, had to endure several insulting questions during the debate. In his case, the question—repeated twice—was, in effect, Are you crazy? McCain, who has borscht-belt timing, used this as a straight line: "A comment like that really makes me mad." For most of the evening, the Senator seemed as loose as Bush was tight. He's been drawing enormous crowds in New Hampshire; his attacks on the "special interests" who "control" Washington are as polished now as a midshipman's belt buckle. But McCain stumbled on a simple, if vexing, question: With several major health-maintenance organizations facing bankruptcy, how would he fix the national health-care system? He didn't have a clue. He mentioned the need for a patients' bill of rights (a worthy, but not quite relevant, answer), and then skipped to another issue.

The health-care question was a rare moment of sobriety in a rather odd evening, in which the moderators flogged peripheral issues. Internet taxation? Air-rage incidents? Or perhaps it was the candidates who made the questions appear peripheral: does it matter if Alan Keyes would intervene in Chechnya? The dense underbrush worked in Bush's favor: he was given time and space to acclimate himself to the national stage, and his moments in the spotlight were too fleeting to expose any weaknesses or many smirks. But it also worked for McCain: his is still an incomplete candidacy—he seems uncertain when the topics range beyond campaign-finance reform and national defense. He betrayed his bias the day before the debate, at a meeting of Jewish Republicans, when he was asked if he thought that foreign policy would be a major subject in the coming year. "I wish it was the only subject," McCain said. —JOE KLEIN

THE BOARDS

The long life of a small musical.

THE musical "Out of the Blue" opens on December 11th for a limited run at the 30th Street Theatre, an Off-Off-Broadway house with seventy-five seats. The explanation of how the show has already become known to millions of people around the world probably begins with Bill Benton's writing it, in the summer of 1984, as an amusement for his children.

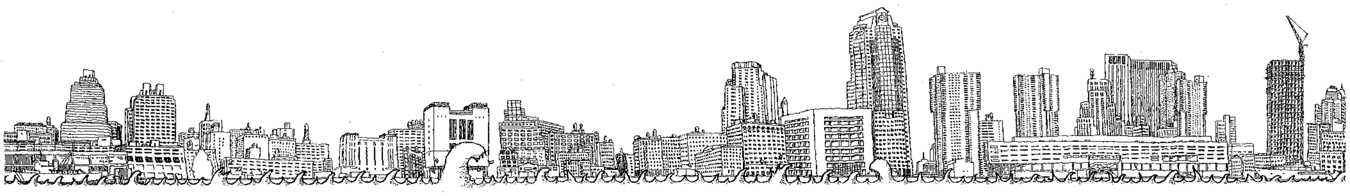
Benton is a poet, middle-aged, tall and thin, with blue eyes, short hair, and a mustache. He grew up outside Galveston, Texas, and left school when he was fifteen. "Incompatible" is what he replies when you ask why. He was at the time, he says, "a kind of whorehouse musical prodigy." He played piano at clubs throughout Texas and the South, and he lived on his own in various dingy motels. One of the clubs, DeElmo's, which belonged to a man named Elmo, was in Kemah, Texas, "a poisonous little waterfront town," Benton says. At DeElmo's, Benton played four shows a night, each featuring a stripper. When he finished, around four-thirty or five in the morning, he was given ten dollars so that he could act as a shill at the dice tables. During the day, Benton read. He thought he would eventually be a composer. "What happened, though," he says, "is I finally got so sick of being in night clubs and around drunks all the time that I got more interested in reading—so I read all day, and that made me a poet. It was my visa out of a lot of Texas white-trash nonsense."

Once Benton became devoted to writing, he gave up the piano until years later, in 1984, when he rented a summer house on the beach in California for him and his teen-age son and daughter. His daughter was crazy about old-fashioned musical comedies—"Fred and Ginger," Benton says, "Judy and Mickey." He thought that writing one would be a great summer project. "So I rented a piano and we wrote the thing," Benton says. "It's the coming of age of a fifteen-year-old girl and the divorce of her parents and the eventual coming of age of her parents. My children made a theatre and a stage and puppets for the characters, and we recorded a dreadful tape of the score, and performed the show for four or five people we'd met, and then the fall arrived and we came back to New York, and I put the thing in a drawer and forgot about it."

About five years ago, Benton was having dinner with Joe Fox, the late Random House editor, and the writers James Salter and Peter Matthiessen. Someone raised the name of a writer he knew who had become wealthy by writing the books for musical comedies. Salter said, "Benton's written a musical—let's all get rich with that." Fox asked to read it. He liked it so much that he got Benton to revise sections of it and engage some actors, and they performed it a couple of times for backers in Fox's apartment.

Fox died in 1995, in his office, of a heart attack. A producer named Muriel Peters took over. She brought "Out of the Blue" to the attention of Brian Barron, the New York correspondent for BBC News. In September, the BBC filmed a backers' audition held at The Players club. "Usually, we do the Metropolitan Opera or mainstream Broadway," Barron says. "But this was an opportunity to show viewers the nuts and bolts of getting a musical produced." The BBC broadcast the report on its stations throughout the world. This week, the network plans to film a dress rehearsal, part of which it will broadcast next week. If the show moves to a larger house for a longer run, the BBC plans to film that, too, leaving New York as one of the few cities in the world where "Out of the Blue" is not already widely known.

If the musical moves to a larger theatre, or even to Broadway, it will not be the highlight of Benton's musical career. The highlight of Benton's musical career occurred in Santa Fe, New Mexico, when he was sitting in with a bar



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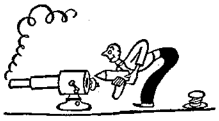
band and a huge black man came onstage from the audience and grabbed the bass from the bass player's hands and took over the show: Charles Mingus, on his way by car from California to New York. —ALEC WILKINSON

DEPT. OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Saddam's nuclear shopping spree.



EVER since the United Nations weapons inspectors were shut out of Iraq, a year ago, the world has been left to wonder what Saddam Hussein is up to. Well, now it can be told: he has been secretly trying to transform his desert dictatorship into a world-class center for the treatment of kidney stones.

Or so it would seem, to judge from his latest purchases on the international medical-equipment market. Although Iraq remains under a strict United Nations embargo, the embargo does not cover medical supplies. Last year, the Iraqi government ordered half a dozen lithotripters, which are state-of-the-art machines for getting rid of kidney stones. (The word "lithotripter" comes from the Greek for "stone breaker.") A lithotripter uses a shock wave to pulverize these painful objects without surgery. Machines like the ones Iraq bought require a high-precision electronic switch that triggers a powerful burst of electricity. In addition to the lithotripters, Iraq wanted to buy a hundred and twenty extra switches. That is at least a hundred more than the machines would ever need.

Iraq's strange hankering for this particular "spare part" becomes less mysterious when one reflects that the switch in question has another use: it can trigger an atomic bomb. According to a knowledgeable U.N. inspector, each bomb of the type that Iraq is trying to build requires thirty-two switches. Thus, a hundred of them would outfit three bombs. It is hardly a coincidence that, as the former U.N. inspector Scott Ritter testified at a Senate hearing last year, the inspectors had "intelligence information which indicates that components necessary for three nuclear weapons exist" in Iraq. Saddam Hussein has been shopping for what he needs to make sure they work.

Iraq went to Siemens, the German electronics giant, to place the order. Before the Gulf War, Iraq acquired Siemens computers and other equipment useful for processing uranium to nuclear-weapons grade, and the company provided electrical equipment for one of Iraq's main missile sites. (Siemens has denied helping Iraq advance its nuclear program.) In this instance, Siemens forwarded the switches order to its supplier, Thomson-C.S.F., a French military-electronics company. The French government promptly barred the sale. Stephen Cooney, a Siemens spokesman, refuses to say whether Siemens nevertheless filled the switch order, or even whether the order was placed. If Siemens made the deal, Iraq got a powerful nuclear boost.

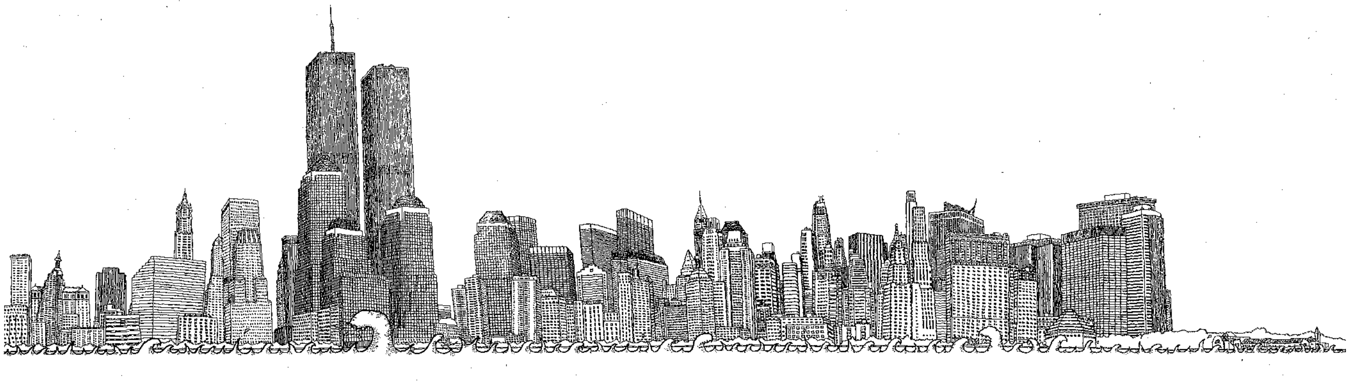
The Clinton Administration has been relatively quiet on Iraq lately. Although it maintains that it remains suspicious of Saddam, it claims to have no specific evidence that he has resumed his efforts to build weapons of mass destruction. The kidney-stone affair suggests otherwise.

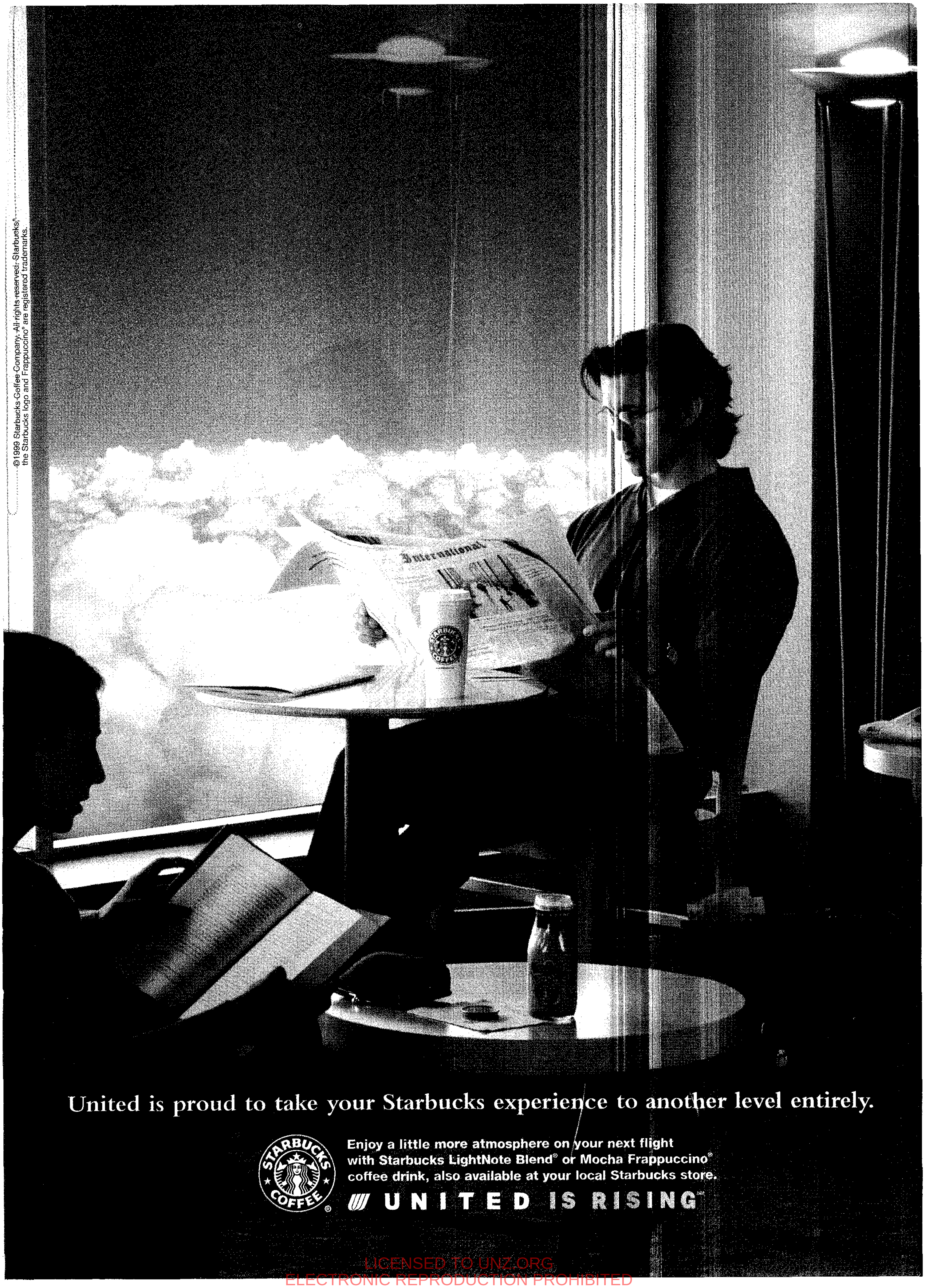
The U.N. inspectors have learned that Iraq's first bomb design, which weighed a ton and was just over a yard in diameter, has been replaced by a smaller, more efficient model. The inspectors have deduced that the new design weighs only about one thousand three hundred pounds and measures about twenty-five inches in diameter. That makes it small enough to fit on a Scud-type missile. The inspectors believe that Iraq may still have nine such missiles hidden somewhere.

The inspectors have also concluded that Iraq's bomb design will work. Iraq, they believe, has mastered the key technique of creating an implosive shock wave, which squeezes a bomb's nuclear material enough to trigger a chain reaction. The new design also uses a "flying tamper," a refinement that "hammers" the nuclear material to squeeze it even harder, so bombs can be made smaller without diminishing their explosive force.

How did Iraq progress so far so quickly? The inspectors found an Iraqi document describing an offer of design help—in exchange for money—from an agent of Pakistan. Iraq says it didn't accept the offer, but the inspectors think it did. Pakistan's latest design also uses a flying tamper. Regardless of how the Iraqis managed to do it, Saddam Hussein now possesses an efficient nuclear-bomb design. And, if he did succeed in getting hold of the necessary switches, then the only thing he lacks is enough weapons-grade uranium to fuel the warheads.

The fuel, unfortunately, is getting easier to find. United States officials report that on May 29th Bulgaria seized approximately a third of an ounce of weapons-grade uranium at its border. The hot cargo, accompanied by documents in Russian, was concealed in a lead container in a pump stowed in a car. A third of an ounce is not enough for a bomb (Iraq's design, for example, needs thirty-five pounds), but this seizure and others like it show that weapons-grade fuel is beginning to circulate in the black market. Unless the U.N. Security Council can agree on a plan to reinstate meaningful inspections, Saddam may be able to complete his nuclear shopping sooner rather than later. —GARY MILHOLLIN

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

FRESH PRINCE

Why Liev Schreiber is ready to play Hamlet.

BY JOHN LAHR

IN 1997, the director Tony Goldwyn was casting "A Walk on the Moon" and he was stuck for an actor to play Marty—the cuckolded blue-collar husband who is more intelligent than his circumstances would indicate—when he got a call from one of his producers, Dustin Hoffman. "There's this kid I'm working with," Hoffman told Goldwyn. "You gotta see him. He's special. He reminds me of me when I was his age." The actor in question was Liev Schreiber, who was on location with Hoffman in "Sphere." Schreiber, who got the job, and turned in one of his subtlest performances to date, is thirty-two and has been out of Yale School of Drama for only seven years. He has so far appeared in twenty-five films and sixteen stage plays. His is not a face familiar from gossip columns or talk shows; but he has a way of impressing the grandees of his craft.

"He has a kind of wisdom about human contradictions that is beyond his years," Hoffman says, comparing Schreiber with his peers in the new generation of actors. "He's very perceptive. He watches and observes, and he's amused by what he observes. It's an intrinsic part of him to transform what he sees into some kind of irony." For the American première of Harold Pinter's "Moonlight," the veteran British film and theatre director Karel Reisz hired Schreiber to play Jake, the older of two brothers, who defends himself against his father's dying messages through a series of private mocking games. "Dazzling," Reisz says was his thought after Schreiber's audition. "This boy can do anything. He's a mixture of urbane and rough. With that mixture, you can cook up a lot of meals."

Schreiber is the fetching transvestite in "Mixed Nuts"; the dithering nerd in "Walking and Talking"; the pretentious, humiliated would-be novelist in "Daytrippers"; one of the slashers in "Scream 2"; and the tattooed kidnapper in "Ransom." Last month, he was the young Orson Welles in HBO's "RKO 281," a bio-pic about the making of "Citizen Kane." This month, as if answering the plea at the end of the *Times* review of his 1998 performance in "Cymbeline"—"more Shakespeare, Mr. Schreiber"—he makes the leap from character actor to leading man: he is playing Hamlet in Andrei Serban's new production, at the Public Theatre.

ON a bright November day, Schreiber scurried, ten minutes late, into a Serban rehearsal. "Sorry," he said, taking his seat in the semicircle around the handsome Romanian director, who was wearing chinos and a T-shirt and wire-rimmed glasses. Serban looked up briefly. "Never again," he said to Schreiber, and then continued analyzing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. "They're like K.G.B. police dogs sniffing around," he said.

Schreiber and Serban have a creatively contentious relationship. "We fight well," Schreiber says. "He explodes the play and makes me take risks. He takes the play away from me." Serban sees Schreiber as a weird hybrid of the classical and the experimental actor. "Any time he tries a monologue, he will resist my idea, which is always to be different," Serban told me later. "He's continuously fighting, resisting, because there's a very classical actor in him. The classical actor is fighting the one that wants to break the rules. Something in him wants to break the rules to find other rules."

In this production, which veers from the visual grotesque to transparent realism, Serban combines various theatrical styles—a mélange of Brechtian artifice and the fairground stylization of Meyerhold—in order to break down conventional expectations and let an audience reëxperience the play. Serban's "Hamlet" begins with the ghost onstage, along with the smoke machine that's producing the ghostly vapors; placards with the faces of other great

SABA

"The classical actor in Schreiber is fighting the one that wants to break the rules." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

stage Hamlets are paraded around when Hamlet is lecturing the players about how to perform; he wears a pig's mask and plays the flute when he tests Ophelia's truthfulness. ("He should be played like a Zen master in madness," Serban told his actors. "We should not be worried for him.") Serban's protean approach is intended to mirror the play's central issue of seeming versus being with a style that is equally elusive. "It's so slippery," says Serban. "Everybody's a director of 'Hamlet,' everybody knows how 'Hamlet' should be done. It may be deeply controversial, but it will not be boring for one second."

Schreiber, who has an intelligent, round face, with pudgy cheeks and a somewhat weak chin—not the angular heroic outline of conventional leading men—is just right for Serban's atypical Hamlet. At six feet three, he has the muscular athleticism of a tight end, the position he played at Brooklyn Tech, where he was the captain of both the junior varsity and the varsity teams in the early eighties. ("I was really quite committed to hitting people," he says.) Serban sees the Prince of Denmark as "a big man with Prometheus-like qualities. It's somebody who cannot live with compromise. A positive version of the Misanthrope. The standards of his quest are so high he cannot fit into the world."

In the scene they ran through that morning, Hamlet has disposed of Polonius's body under the stairs ("Safely stow'd"). Dressed in a bloodstained butcher's apron, Schreiber popped up and down around the stage like a Grand Guignol jack-in-the-box, wielding a prop butcher knife and taunting the courtiers. At one point, he improvised cutting off his own finger, and this, after a good laugh from the assembled company, instantly became part of his character. "He's this volcano of a man who's clowning, who's sensitive, who's intelligent," Serban says of Schreiber. "Suddenly he does something like an animal, something that is so dangerous and so fresh."

All afternoon, Schreiber was happy playing the giddy goat, but at a rehearsal a week later, pressed for time at a run-through and balking at the rationale for wearing the pig's mask in the Ophelia scene, Schreiber had a real knockdown fight with Serban, and stormed out. "He just wouldn't do it with the mask," Serban said when he called me the next day to talk about what happened. "Then we both started to scream at each other. Finally, he did it, but it was humiliating for me and for him, because he had to just do it and shut up. Then, when he did the scene in the afternoon, in the run-through, although he was not at all sure that I was right, he did it with such candid innocence. It was fantastic." He adds, "Liev is uncorrupted in his feelings. He has lived life as a tough kid and has been bruised by life, and yet what he retained, which is remarkable, is a certain purity."

SCHREIBER lives about a two-minute walk from the Public, in a large south-facing one-bedroom apartment that looks out onto the Lower East Side, where he grew up in dingier circumstances. He bought the apartment two and a half years ago, but he has logged in only six months there. The place, like the man, feels in transition. The large main room, which is dominated by a whitewashed fireplace and a behemoth TV, tries to be adult, but the bric-a-brac of Schreiber's youth is everywhere: diplomas on the wall, fencing trophies on the mantel, a mountain bike propped in the hall.

Schreiber is about Hamlet's age, and he sees the Prince's concerns—even issues of family betrayal and personal humiliation—as part of a shared journey. The totems of his own spiritual quest are mixed with the childhood memorabilia around him: a gold Buddha sits stoically on the window ledge; Shakespeare glossaries and concordances clutter the glass dining-room table; on the kitchen counter is a collection of Shakespeare's sonnets; Shakespeare's influences—Seneca and Montaigne—are on the coffee table. Hamlet may be the most observed of all observers, but for him, and for Schreiber, growth lies in refusing the definitions of others. "The death of Hamlet's father creates a crisis for him—an identity crisis," Schreiber says. "He removes himself from the position of seeing himself through other people's eyes—Hamlet the Dane, Prince of Denmark, loved of Ophelia, the analytical whiz kid of Wittenberg, doted on by his mother. He tries to really understand what they're seeing and how much truth is in it."

The questions the play raises—What is real? What is truth? What is the difference between seeming and being?—

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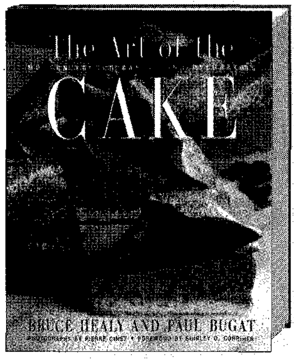

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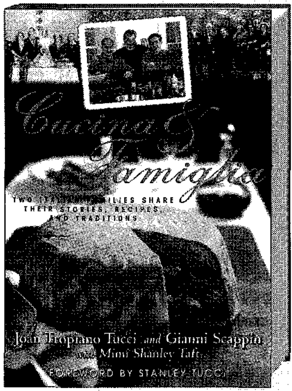
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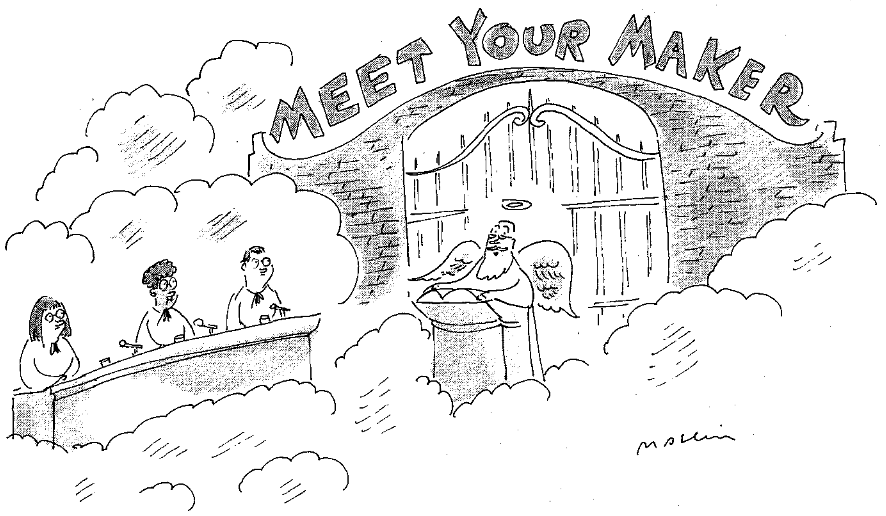

"We're about ready to play 'Meet Your Maker,' but, first, let's meet the recently deceased."

• •

are questions that Schreiber is trying to answer in his life and career. He started analysis a year ago and is just coming to see his profession as a form of spiritual inquiry and not merely as an exercise in narcissism and money-making. "This is the beginning of something different for me. A huge step," Schreiber says. "Hamlet's the biggest thing that's ever happened to me. I need to address my life the way that Hamlet addresses his."

SCHREIBER still answers to his infant nickname of Huggy. His father, Tell, who taught acting, came from a wealthy society family; he graduated from Dartmouth and was a wrestling and football star and an aspiring actor. His mother, Heather, who was born into a Brooklyn working-class household of Jewish Communists, is a highly cultured eccentric, with a firm knowledge of classical music and Russian literature (Liev is named after Tolstoy). But for many years she had a shaky grip on reality. "I was kind of strange," she says. "I think I liked silence and not being connected to the world." Heather, who has lived for the past fifteen years in an ashram in Virginia, was seven years older than her husband when they took up with each other in the mid-sixties, and was already the mother of three sons. When Heather was twelve, her own mother was lobotomized. As a result, Tell says, "Heather was a mother almost by compulsion. A somewhat peculiar mother, but I think a good mother." According to Tell, at the beginning of their marriage, in San Francisco, Heather had a bad experience on LSD and subsequently, over the next four years, was repeatedly admitted to hospitals and underwent therapy. The family moved to a ten-acre farm in British Columbia, which Tell thought would be "therapeutic." But, feeling herself held captive and threatened by Tell with being put in a mental institution, Heather bolted. As Tell pursued his AWOL wife, Liev and his mother were trailed by private detectives in various states; when he was three, he was kidnapped by his father from an upstate New York commune where Heather had decamped. By the time Liev was four, he was living with her on the fourth floor of a dilapidated walkup at First Avenue and First Street (his half brothers from her first marriage were parked with their father in a duplex on Central Park West), and he was the object of a fierce custody battle, which bankrupted his beloved maternal grandfather, Alex Milgram. (Milgram was the significant male of Schreiber's youth. He played the cello and owned Renoir etchings, and made his living by delivering meat to restaurants.)

Even in a strict geographical sense, Schreiber grew up in a sort of no man's land: the Hasidic community lay to the south, the Polish and Ukrainian communities to the north; to the east were Puerto Ricans; the Bowery lay to the west. According to his mother, Liev "was the only white kid on the block." "I spent an awful lot of time in the window," says Schreiber, who was a walking projection of Heather's hippie-Hindu fantasy: she dressed him in yoga shirts, overalls, and sneakers from the A. & P., which were "very, very uncool" among his Puerto Rican peers. "There was a pretty deep sense of shame," Schreiber told me. Until he was ten, Liev was forced by his mother to wear his blond hair down to his shoulders. "I looked like a girl," Schreiber says.

"I can't imagine how I could have been so stupid," Heather says of those days, when she was supporting them by driving a cab and making papier-mâché puppets. "I loved his hair. He looked like an angel and acted like a devil. Ladies would come over, and they would fawn over him. He would say things like 'Fuck you, lady.' He was a horrible kid, really horrible, but he looked exquisite."

"I took a kind of a beating," Schreiber says. "I was one of those 'Can I play?' kids, whom people didn't want in the group. They would run away from me. And when I did get to participate I was kind of awkward and hyper. I would go into my head a lot. I was very good at making up stories."

Schreiber's isolation and humiliation were compounded by his mother's apartment—a railroad flat, with a bathtub in the kitchen, that had no hot water, no electricity, no beds, no chairs, no tables. "Heather was a garbage-picker," Schreiber says. She and her son sat on boxes and slept on mattresses on the floor, both in the same room. A gutted piano leaned up against one wall. The apartment was lit by candles stuck into the bricks. "I loved poverty," says Heather. "I thought rich people were kind of stupid. I know that sounds insane. I thought it was bohemian and romantic. I was really kind of silly. It was fun, but probably not for him."

Although Liev says he "fought her like crazy"—boycotting dance and piano lessons, refusing to read, doing poorly at school—he was also an accessory to Heather's wacky regime: he ate vegetarian, took the Hindu names of Sivadas and Ayappa, meditated, and attended only black-and-white movies. ("You can imagine the resentment that I felt when I saw my first color movie, which was 'Star Wars,' in 1977," Schreiber says.) "Once, he brought a little boy to the house, but

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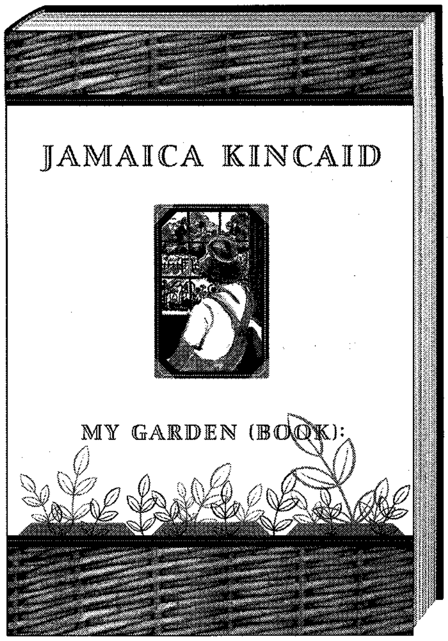

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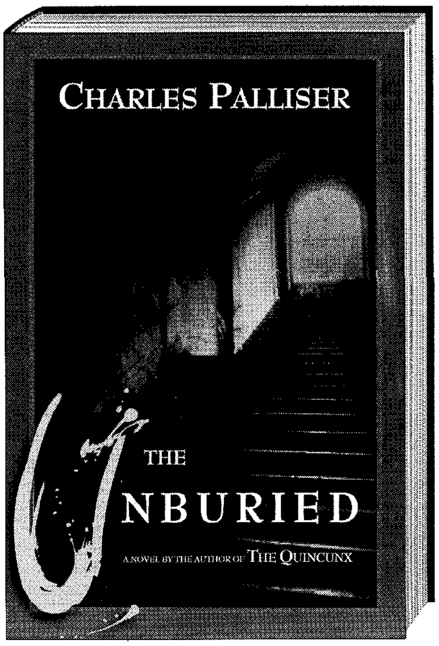

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FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

the boy had to go home," Heather recalls. "He didn't like to be in the dark. Huggy found all this mortifying. Why couldn't we be just regular straight folks who wore polyester? Why couldn't we just eat Thomas' English Muffins? He was very anti-me. In the second grade, they asked the children to write biographies of themselves. He wrote that he lived in this terrible situation with his mother, who was an alcoholic prostitute. The teachers felt terribly sorry for him. They would give him all sorts of things to eat that I didn't approve of—like peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches."

According to Heather, probably because she cast him in an adult role, Schreiber as a boy "didn't see any difference between adults and children. He hit two teachers." Their relationship was—and is—stormy but intimate. "My temper is incredible with my mother," says Schreiber, who, like all dutiful sons, pays a high emotional price for his faithfulness. "He's very protective of me, and very nasty," Heather says. "He'll yell at me, 'Oh! It's all about you! It's all about you!' He thinks I'm very self-centered. I think I'm self-centered, but compared to other people? Nah, I'm a bargain." She goes on, "He says I don't deserve any credit. He always says that. 'Neither you nor Tell.' He thinks we're both losers. I just think it's amusing. Because he so doesn't get it."

To a large extent, Schreiber's professional shape-shifting and his uncanny instinct for isolating the frightened, frail, goofy parts of his characters are a result of being forced to adapt to his mother's eccentricities. It's both his grief and his gift. Schreiber, who in his newly acquired psychotherapeutic lingo refers to himself as "an empathic personality," learned early to be sensitive to the needs of others and to decipher their motivation. "I could understand anybody," he says. "I was incredibly good at analyzing behavior. I knew what people were after. I loved to give them what they wanted. I loved to live up to expectations."

Once, at Yale, Schreiber was asked to perform an autobiography in movement. He played a child holding his mother's hand. "He just held the hand up high walking in a circle," his Yale movement teacher and friend Wesley Fata says. "Slowly that hand came down to where he became the adult and the parent became the child." Although Heather was compassionate, imaginative, and resourceful—and she encouraged those qualities in her son (she bought him a motorcycle at sixteen, to promote fearlessness)—she had some paranoid episodes in those years. "She would think that there were demons in the house," Schreiber says. He became her champion and protector. It was an impossible position, at once empowering and undermining. Heather saw him as her "miracle boy." "Not a day passed but she figured out three times to say, 'You're brilliant,'" Tell Schreiber recalls. "Oh, my God, it was insufferable." The message that Schreiber received from his mother and learned to transmit back to her was "We are king. We are two fish in a bowl. The rest of the world will never understand us."

Between the ages of eight and thirteen, Schreiber stole things. "Anything," he says. "Money, mostly." The rationale was that he needed money to "buy sneakers and be like the other kids." But in stealing he was also acting out his anger at being a kind of psychological hostage to what he calls his mother's "daffy bliss." He pinched coins from his grandfather's laundry-change bowl, and he stole from the Integral Yoga Institute, where Heather worked, which eventually got her "in a lot of trouble." Having memorized the combination to the institute's safe, Schreiber shinnied three floors down a drainpipe, climbed in the window, and cracked the safe. "I was role-playing," he says. "The whole cat-burglar thing was 'To Catch a Thief.' It wasn't real money. It didn't belong to anybody. It was a movie. If I could be daring enough to go down the side of this building and get in her office, that money was mine." Over a period of years—Schreiber stole at judicious intervals—he took about five thousand dollars. He bought Polaroid cameras and meals for the kids in his neighborhood. But it didn't bring him closer to anyone. "Just made them think I was weirder," he says. At the age of eight, he treated himself to a helicopter ride around Manhattan with some of his stolen money. "I recently asked him, 'How did you do that?'" Heather says. "He said, 'Well, I told the pilot that my dad was just up the street and he was coming in a minute.' Then after a while—this is so creative!—he went to get his dad. He came back and said, 'My dad's busy. He can't come, but he gave me the money and said you should take me.'" She adds, "He was a wonderful con artist."

It took the institute a number of years to figure out who the thief was. When he was caught, at the age of twelve, Schreiber was packed off for a few lonely semesters to an ashram school in Pomfret, Connecticut. He took care of ponies and studied religion and philosophy, which, when he returned to junior high school at New York's I.S. 70, only qualified him for seeming "weird again." "He wasn't cool," says the TV actress Nadia Dajani, who was at I.S. 70 with Schreiber and still teases him about being a "hoodlum." "If you were in Catholic school, and you wanted to date a rebel,

"We're still a damn good race when it comes to catching a cab."

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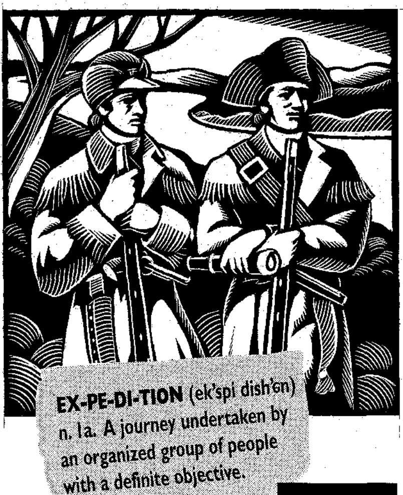

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then you dated Huggy. But otherwise, no." She adds, "He was just a street punk from my neighborhood. He could have ended up like all these other idiots that we grew up with. In jail. I think Huggy was headed for that."

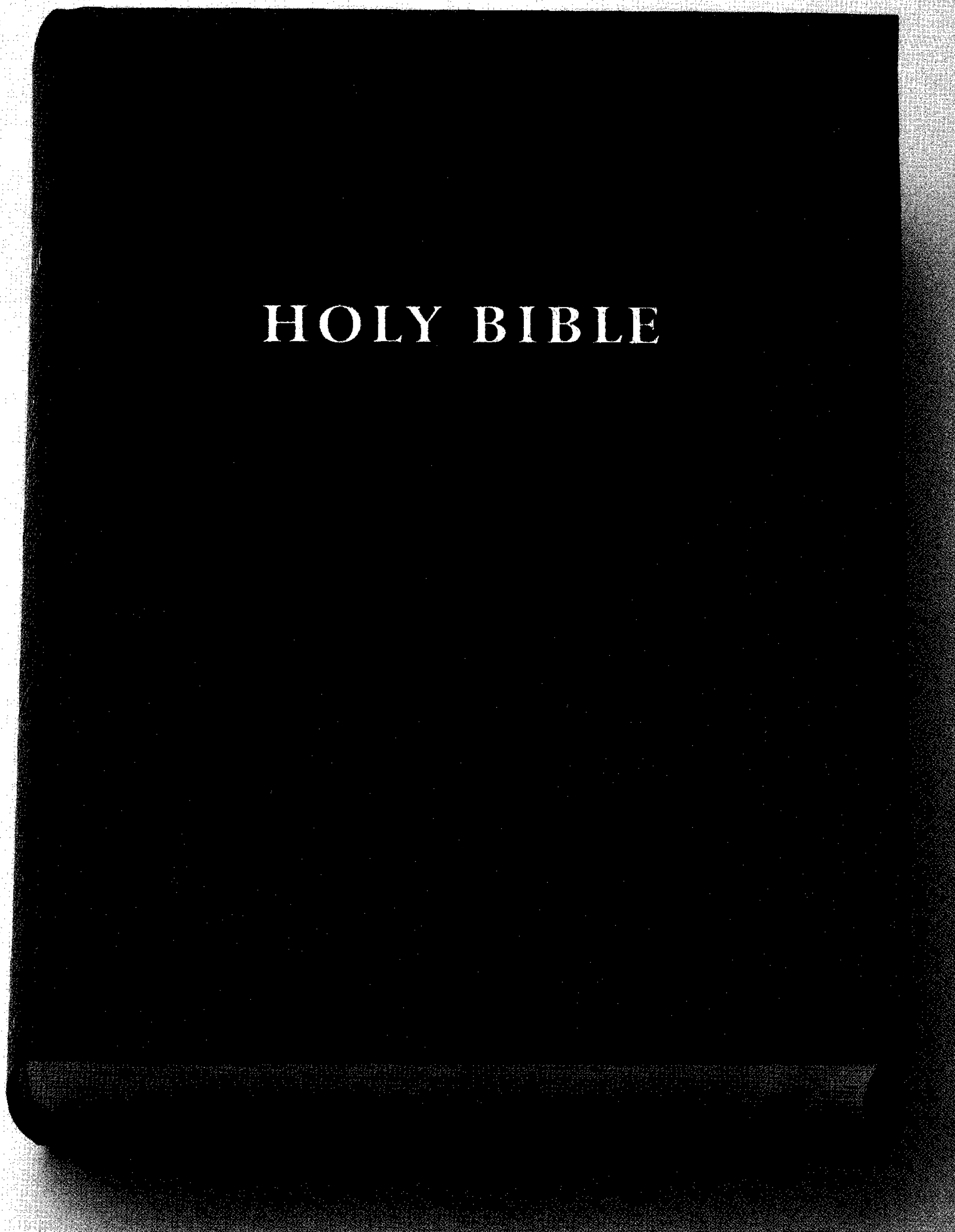
What turned things around for Schreiber was a football injury—a fractured ankle—at Brooklyn Tech, in 1984, which ended his sports career and led to his theatrical one. At the time, Heather approached Tell to pay for a good surgeon. He was happy to be invited back into his son's life; he paid for the doctor and also for private school. Liev ended up downtown at the exclusive Friends Seminary. Having learned how to be a ballplayer and a homeboy at Brooklyn Tech, he was now thrown in with the children of the upper-middle class, whom he'd been taught since childhood to despise. When he played Nick Bottom in the school production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—"I made a complete ass out of myself in the best way"—he found not just popularity but also his calling. Acting replaced stolen money as Schreiber's social currency; it provided a full, articulated sense of humor, true pathos, and a mask for admitting his fears. Schreiber considers the characters in plays his "peers": "Hamlet. Nick Bottom. Suddenly, there were people who were like me, who had been shamed worse than I had ever been shamed. Suddenly I could create a context for my life through characters. People would appreciate me through my characters, which validated my own experience. Plus at the same time—this is even more important to me—validated their experience."

This commonality was brought home to Schreiber in his first solo performance, at the age of eighteen, at Hampshire College, where he got his B.A. He was doing scenes from Eric Bogosian's "Drinking in America." Schreiber has a video of himself strutting and fuming in a startlingly assured streetwise imitation of "a total maniac that I hung out with," he says. "The monologues were all very hostile, very harsh. I was sort of saying, 'You think you know me, you bunch of rich kids from Hampshire College. This is where I come from.' " To Schreiber's amazement, the audience loved it. "I realized that we had a common bond," he says. "And the recognition of that bond was incredibly comforting, because I was afraid for a very long time that I had no bond." He adds, "It's very encouraging to know that your journey—as painful as it may be or as confusing as it may be—is not that different from the guy you're sitting across from. The more bizarre it gets, the more painful it gets, the more people seem to embrace it."

IN mid-November, at a private screening of "RKO 281" at the Sutton Theatre, the head of HBO, Jeff Bewkes, called out the names of the distinguished cast members—including Brenda Blethyn, James Cromwell, and Roy Scheider—and asked them to stand. When he got to Schreiber, he said, "Finally, an actor of great range and talent, who will soon portray another quirky guy, Hamlet." Later, at the Waldorf, where HBO was throwing a party, Schreiber, dressed in a sharp designer jacket with a gray tie and a black shirt, cupped a Martini glass in both hands and assessed his performance as the boy genius Orson Welles. "It's complex. It's ambiguous, but it's human. That's the most you can hope for," he said.

Schreiber's career has been unusual for the ease with which he's moved between independent films, big-budget Hollywood films, TV films, and theatre. "I don't know that I want to be an actor for the rest of my life," he says. He is developing films to produce and perhaps direct, among them an adaptation of "The Merchant of Venice," for Dustin Hoffman. He has a deep, serious understanding of his craft. On the Orson Welles film, for instance, in many scenes he persuaded the director to use reaction shots instead of lines. "When he doesn't speak is when the truth kind of seeps out of him," Schreiber says. "That's what I'm interested in trying to find. The inexpressible. What's behind a guy who is twenty-four years old and has been thought a genius since he was eight."

I asked Schreiber what he thought *was* behind Welles. He answered without missing a beat. "A tremendous amount of deep, deep fear and insecurity," he said. "And a desire to know who he was—hoping that somehow by working he was going to define himself." ♦



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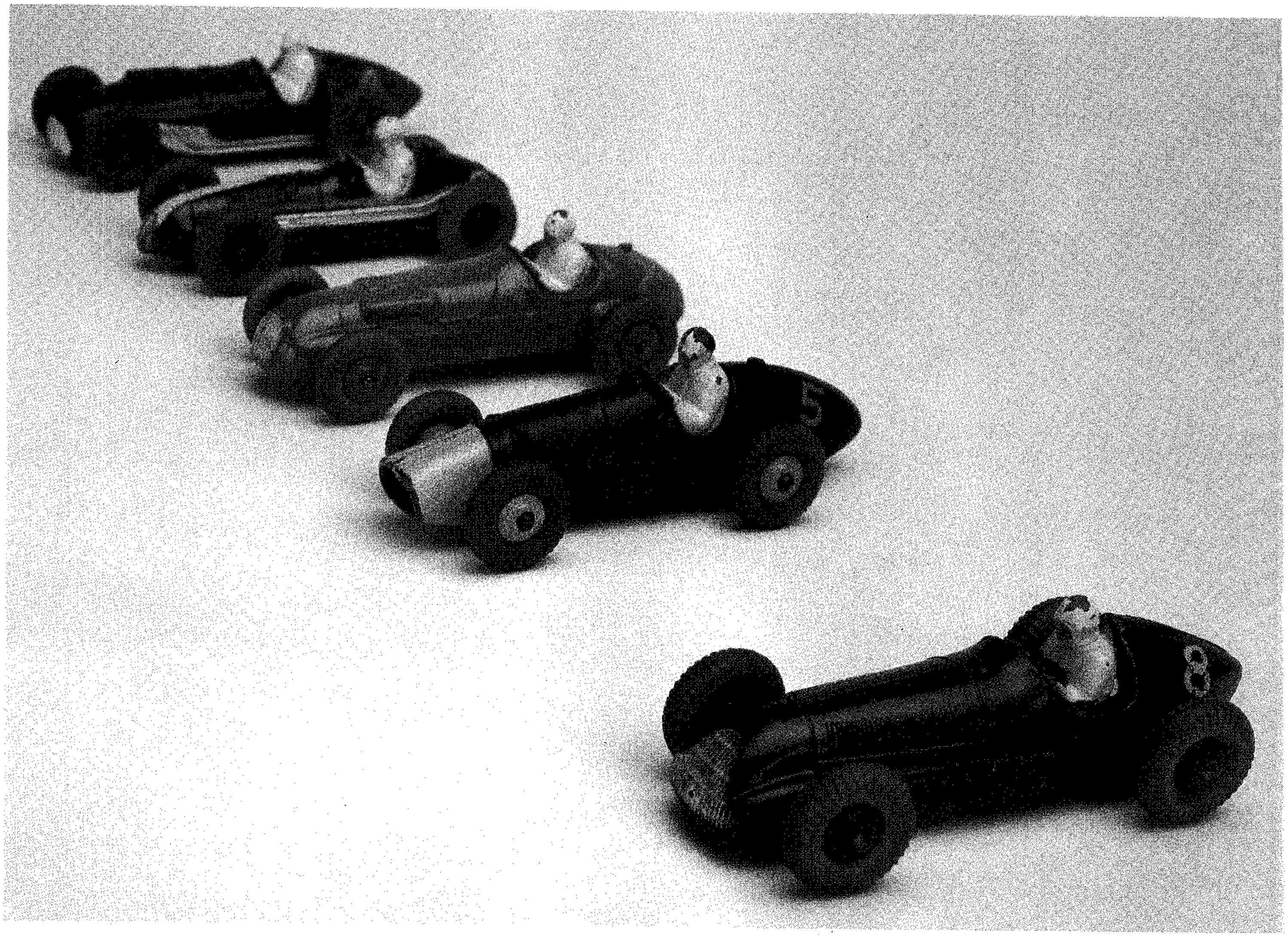

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GIFTS OF STATE, GOING FAST

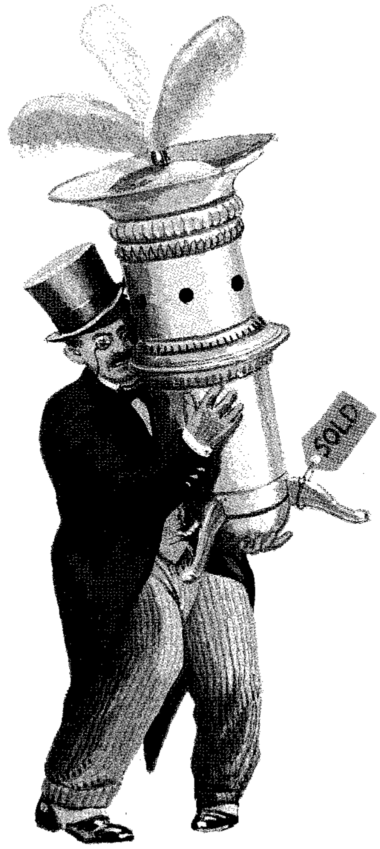
BY BRUCE McCALL

“I PICKED up a pair of snakeskin hip-waders, the intended state gift of the Republic of Korea to the people of Liechtenstein,” boasts Clem D., of Minolta, Wisconsin, “and the cork-lined ormolu presentation case they came in!” Meanwhile, the President of Kazakhstan’s recently spiked junket to the United Arab Emirates proved a windfall for Mrs. Merle T., of Hailstorm Corners, South Dakota, who scooped up both Kazakhstan’s state gift to the U.A.E.—a carved mahogany camel filled with pressurized natural gas—and the U.A.E.’s reciprocal gift to Kazakhstan—a brace of pearl-handled can openers—for “chump change”!

What have Clem D. and Mrs. T. got that you haven’t? Membership in the Gifts of State Warehouse Discount Club. Thanks to that unpredictable world economy, ceremonial visits to foreign lands are constantly going *phffft* as national leaders shuffle cabinets, padlock banks, or just try to look busy back home—deep-sixing those time-honored exchanges of personalized one-of-a-kind state gifts.

And that’s where the Gifts of State Warehouse Discount Club comes in: every time a state visit goes kaput, another bargain is born. Our Bronze Sash Club members get first crack at what’s fast becoming a stupefying selection of steals. How would you feel about owning the eighteenth-century spinet, fashioned entirely of turkey feathers, that would have been Hong Kong’s gift to the people of Uruguay? Or how about the solid-silver rain barrel meant to remind the folks of Mauritius that the folks in Sri Lanka are thinking of them? The two-by-two-feet Mercator projection of the globe, worked in toothpaste on a stretched weasel skin, that North Korean President Kim Jong Il was going to deliver to the people of the Republic of the Sudan? They’re all in the current Club catalogue, and priced to move.

“IMAGINE a spot welder in Erie, Pa., owning the people of Uzbekistan’s intended gift to the people of Tonga!” burbles a new Club member. “That oversized licorice sculpture of a great horned owl clutching a marzipan mouse in its beak is a party icebreaker at my house every Saturday night!” Sorry, collectors, but Catalogue Item No. 32, the hand-punctured two-hour piano roll of dolphin roundelays originally scheduled to be handed over in an official state ceremony by the leader of the Vietnamese people to the leader of the people of Cambodia, has already been snapped up.



BRUCE McCALL

Silver Sash Club members enjoy even greater benefits. If you can pay your own airfare, you are invited to fly to a distant land, and, as the official stand-in for a no-show state leader, you can present his people’s gift in person! “I got to visit Brunei and deliver the Philippines’ gift of a life-size wax model of a seventeenth-century Spanish wishing well to His Majesty the Sultan,” reports satisfied customer Chuck C., of Point Nebulous, Maine. “Plus, I was invited to stick around afterward for drinks!” Chuck’s other reward? He got to take home Brunei’s planned gift to the Philippine people—a rare found-driftwood sculpture of a cowboy shooting the Loch Ness monster, mounted on an onyx base.

One lucky Silver Sash Club member will get to bear Iceland’s gift of a genuine Norse battle-axe, preserved in a Plexiglas tub of genuine tenth-century sea brine, to a grateful Pakistani nation, then turn around and present the people of Iceland with Pakistan’s appreciative counter-token, rumored around Islamabad’s diplomatic quarter to be something big and frisky in a cage.

Finally, Gold Sash Club members are eligible for the buy-three-get-one-free discount program. Japan’s intention of honoring Afghanistan with a lavishly electroplated bonsai Christmas tree, bearing dozens of microprocessor-powered origami wind chimes, fell through when the Diet’s confidence in the Prime Minister did; as a Gold Sash Club member in good standing, you can be there to catch it, at no cost, when you’ve bought three other state gifts at the regular price!

And don’t forget: choices from our Gifts of State Warehouse Discount Club Bargain Bin make great stocking stuffers—and *all are priced at just ninety-nine cents!* Items include the solar-powered carving knife that unforeseen circumstances prevented the Sultan of Oman from presenting to the Ayatollah of Iran; Wallis and Futuna’s set of nesting plastic wastebaskets, destined never to star at that formal reception in Nepal; the United States of America’s undelivered state gift to the people of Chad, a hundred-dollar check made out to cash.

Don’t hesitate: remember, a bank-reform bill in the Japanese Diet, a government payday in Moscow, one upbeat I.M.F. economic forecast, and world leaders could start jetting around the globe tomorrow to trade exotic tokens of friendship again, forcing you to give friends and loved ones the same-old same-old chafing dishes and scented candles. So better hurry! ♦

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"Deeply affecting, even thrilling... The story surprised and delighted me at every turn."
—JAY PARINI

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—AUDREY C. FOOTE,
Washington Post Book World

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REPUTATIONS

THE ACCIDENTAL CREATIONIST

Why Stephen Jay Gould is bad for evolution.

BY ROBERT WRIGHT

FOUR months ago, when the Kansas Board of Education voted to cut evolution from the mandatory science curriculum, few people were more outraged than Stephen Jay Gould. Teaching biology without evolution is "like teaching English but making grammar optional," Gould said. The Kansas decision reeked of "absurdity" and "ignorance" and was a national embarrassment. The question of whether to teach evolution "only comes up in this crazy country," he told an audience at the University of Kansas after the decision.

All of this is more or less true. But it's also true that, over the years, Gould himself has lent real strength to the creationist movement. Not intentionally, of course. Gould's politics are secular left, the opposite of creationist politics, and his outrage toward creationists is genuine. Yet, in spite of this stance—and, oddly, in some ways because of it—he has wound up aiding and abetting their cause.

This indictment of Gould will no doubt surprise his large reading public. After all, in addition to being America's unofficial evolutionist laureate, Gould is a scientist of sterling credentials—a Harvard paleontologist and, currently, the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In what more capable hands could the defense of science rest?

This indictment will also surprise many evolutionary biologists, but for different reasons. It isn't that they necessarily consider Gould a great scientist; a number of insiders take a quite different view. But they do generally think of him as a valiant warrior against the creationist hordes. The eminent British biologist John Maynard Smith has observed, "Gould occupies a rather curious position, particularly on his side of the Atlantic. Because of the excellence of his essays, he has come to be seen by nonbiologists as the preëminent evolutionary theorist. In contrast, the evolutionary biologists with whom I have discussed his work tend to see him as a man whose ideas are so confused as to be hardly worth bothering with, but as one who should not be publicly criticized because he is at least on our side against the creationists."

In truth, though, Gould is not helping the evolutionists, and the sooner they realize that the better. For, as Maynard Smith has noted, Gould "is giving nonbiologists a largely false picture of the state of evolutionary theory."

Over the past three decades, in essays, books, and technical papers, Gould has advanced a distinctive view of evolution. He stresses its flukier aspects—freak environmental catastrophes and the like—and downplays natural selection's power to design complex life forms. In fact, if you really pay attention to what he is saying, and accept it, you might start to wonder how evolution could have created anything as intricate as a human being.

As it happens, creationists have been wondering the very same thing, and they're delighted to have a Harvard paleontologist who will nourish their doubts. Gould is a particular godsend to the more intellectual anti-evolutionists, who mount the sustained (and ostensibly secular) critiques that give creationism a veneer of legitimacy. In attacking Darwinian theory, they don't have to build a straw man; Gould has built one for them. When Phillip E. Johnson, the most noted of these writers, begins a sentence, "As Stephen Jay Gould describes it, in his fine book," this is not good cause for Gould to swell with pride.

Gould also performs a more subtle service for creationists. Having bolstered their caricature of Darwinism as implausible, he bolsters their caricature of it as an atheist plot. He depicts evolution as something that can't possibly reflect a higher purpose, and thus can't provide the sort of spiritual consolation most people are after. Even Gould's recent book "Rocks of Ages," which claims to reconcile science and religion, draws this moral from the story of evolution: we live in a universe that is "indifferent to our suffering."

Obviously, if the grounds for this conclusion are as firm as he says, then we have to live with it. But they're not. Though modern Darwinism is incompatible with various religious beliefs (such as a literal interpretation of Genesis), it needn't alienate religious seekers of a liberal-minded variety: those with no attachment to any scriptural creation scenario but with a suspicion—or, at least, a hope—that life has more meaning than meets the eye. Indeed, the Darwinian account of our creation, once stripped of the misconceptions that Gould has covered it with, is not only compatible with a higher purpose but vaguely suggestive of one.

All the favors that Gould unwittingly performs for creationists can be traced to his thinking on the fundamental issue of "directionality," or "progressivism"—that is, how inclined evolution is (if at all) to build more complex and intelligent animals over time.

Consider the bombardier beetle. In one compartment, the beetle carries a harmless chemical mix. In another compartment resides a catalyst. The beetle adds the catalyst to the mix to create a scalding substance that he can then spray, through a pliable rear-end nozzle, on tormentors. (This basic idea—making chemicals safe to transport but deadly when deployed—would, long after natural selection invented it, be reinvented by human beings, in the form of binary chemical weapons.)

Clearly, a beetle equipped with two munitions tanks and a spray nozzle is more complex than a beetle lacking such accoutrements. And this isn't just any old kind of biological complexity. The beetle's arsenal involves behavioral complexity: aiming and squirting a toxic nozzle. Aiming and squirting—like any impressive behavior—involves information processing, a command-and-control system. In some small measure, then, evolution's promotion of the beetle to bombardier rank involved a growth in intelligence. In other lineages, the evolution of intelligence—of behavioral complexity—has proceeded further. And we have binary chemical weapons, among other things, to show for it.

WAS this general trend in the cards? Or is the growth in complexity and intelligence we've seen on this planet more or less an accident, something that doesn't flow from basic properties of natural selection?

Gould's main service to creationism is making evolution sound like a very unlikely means of producing a species as impressive as ours.

ANDREA VENTURA

Ten years ago, Gould's position on the directionality issue was extreme: he didn't concede even that biological complexity has tended to grow over time. This reluctance, evident in his book "Wonderful Life" (1989), was harshly criticized (by me, for one), and he has since abandoned it. (Full disclosure: I made the criticism in an unfavorable review of Gould's book, and he has since written unfavorable things about my work.) In his more recent assault on directionality, the 1996 book "Full House," Gould allows that the outer envelope of complexity—the complexity of the most complex species around—may tend to grow. For that matter, he acknowledges, the average complexity of all species may have grown. But he insists that this growth does not constitute "progress" because it is fundamentally "random."

To explain what he means by "random," Gould uses the metaphor of "the drunkard's walk." A drunk is heading down a sidewalk that runs east-west. Skirting the sidewalk's south side is a brick wall, and on the north side is a curb and a street. Will the drunk eventually veer off the curb, into the street? Probably. Does this mean he has a "northerly directional tendency"? No. He's just as likely to veer south as north. But when he veers south the wall bounces him back to the north. He is taking "a random walk" that just seems to have a directional tendency.

To take the metaphor a bit further, if you get enough drunks and give them enough time, one of them may eventually get all the way to the other side of the street. That's us: the lucky species that, through millions of years of random motion, happened to get to the far north, the land of great complexity. But we didn't get there because north is an inherently valuable place to be. If it weren't for the brick wall—that is, the fact that no species can have less than zero complexity—there would be just as many drunks south of the sidewalk as north of it, and the randomness of all their paths would be obvious. Gould writes, "The vaunted progress of life is really *random motion away from simple beginnings*, not *directed impetus toward inherently advantageous complexity*."

What Gould neglects is a number of nonrandom factors that fall under the rubric of "positive feedback." The bombardier beetle is a good example. Since there was a time when beetles didn't exist, there must have been a time when no animals were specially adapted to kill and eat them. Then beetles came along, and then various animals did acquire, by natural selection, the means to kill and eat them. This growth in behavioral complexity spurred a response: the beetle's binary weapon. Thus does complexity breed complexity—positive feedback.

One might expect that, given enough time, beetle predators would up the ante, developing some clever way to neutralize the beetle's noxious spray. In fact, they have. Skunks and one species of mouse, the biologists James Gould (no relation) and William Keeton have written, "evolved specialized innate behavior patterns that cause the spray to be discharged harmlessly, and they can then eat the beetles." Evolutionary biologists call this form of positive feedback an "arms race." Richard Dawkins and John Tyler Bonner, among others, have noted that arms races favor the evolution of complexity. Yet Gould's two books on the evolution of complexity don't even mention the phenomenon.

Finding evidence of arms races in the fossil record is tricky. But Harry Jerison, a paleoneurologist at U.C.L.A., measured the remnants of various mammalian lineages spanning tens of millions of years and discerned a suggestive pattern. In North America, the "relative brain size" of carnivorous mammals—brain size in proportion to body size—showed a strong tendency to grow over time. So did the relative brain size of the herbivorous mammals that were their prey. Meanwhile, comparable South American herbivores, which faced no predators, showed almost no growth in relative brain size. Apparently, ongoing species-against-species duels are conducive to progress.

Arms races can happen within species, not just between them. For example, male chimps spend lots of time scheming to top each other. They form coalitions that, on attaining political dominance, get prime sexual access to females. So savvy males should, on average, get the most genes into the next generation, raising the average level of savviness. And, the savvier the average chimp, the savvier chimps have to be to excel in the next round. There's little doubt that this arms race has helped make chimps as smart as they are, and there's no clear reason that the process should stop now.

Yet natural selection, as described by

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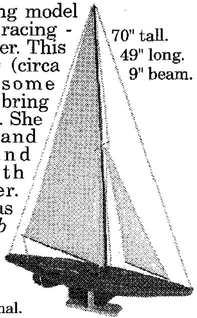

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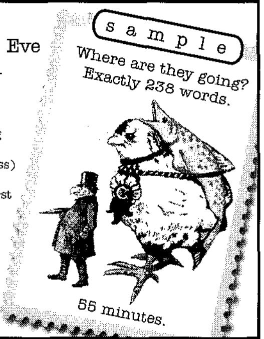

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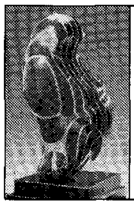

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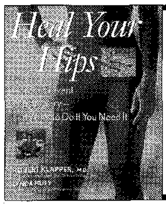

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Gould, has no room for such a dynamic. "Natural selection talks only about 'adaptation to changing local environments,'" he writes. And "the sequence of local environments in any one place should be effectively random through geological time—the seas come in and the seas go out, the weather gets colder, then hotter, etc. If organisms are tracking local environments by natural selection, then their evolutionary history should be effectively random as well."

This would be good logic if environments consisted entirely of sea and air. But a living thing's environment consists largely of other living things: things it eats and things that eat it, not to mention members of its own species which compete and consort with it. And no one—not even Gould—denies that the average complexity of all species constituting this organic environment tends to grow. Nor would it matter if we assumed, along with Gould, that back at the dawn of life the growth in average complexity was wholly random. The fact would remain that, for whatever reason, environmental complexity started to grow. Species, in "tracking" this growth of complexity, can't be described as stumbling around randomly. Their evolution is directional. And since they are part of the environment of other species the process is self-reinforcing. More positive feedback.

The evolution of human intelligence has the earmarks of positive feedback. To the extent that we can judge from an imperfect fossil record, the growth in brain size—from *Australopithecus africanus* through *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, and early *Homo sapiens* to modern *Homo sapiens*—is fairly brisk, with no signs of backtracking and little in the way of pauses. This suggests three million years of pretty persistent brain expansion.

In Gould's world view, the only way to explain this trend is as a long series of lucky coin flips—the most serendipitous drunken walk in the history of drinking. And it isn't just our ancestors, in Gould's scheme, who were so lucky. Mammalian lineages broadly exhibit movement toward braininess.

The odds of all this happening by luck alone, as Gould would have it, seem to me not that different from the odds that God created all species in a few days. By the basic criterion of scientific judgment—that the most plausible story wins—it's roughly a tie. So, as long as Gould's version of evolution dominates popular understanding, why should the average school-board member find one theory beyond serious doubt and the other unworthy of mention? Neither fits the facts.

Gould recognizes that his story is an unlikely one. If you replayed evolution on this planet, he says, the chances of getting any species as smart as humans—smart enough to reflect on itself—are "extremely small." In fact, he fairly delights in the prospect that "we are, whatever our glories and accomplishments, a momentary cosmic accident that would never arise again if the tree of life could be replanted from seed and regrown under similar conditions." To insist otherwise, to see evolution as a natural progression toward intelligent forms of life, is to indulge a "delusion" grounded in "human arrogance" and desperate "hope."

This is where Gould's aims, perversely, converge with those of the creationists: both, for their own philosophical reasons, want to depict the evolution of a human level of intelligence as spectacularly unlikely. But what, exactly, is Gould's philosophical reason? Why is he so chipper about our creation's being an aimless and pointless process? The answer lies in Darwinism's checkered political past.

EARLY in this century, biological progressivism was dear to the hearts of social Darwinists, who used evolution to justify racism, imperialism, and a laissez-faire indifference to poverty. Part of the logic behind social Darwinism—to the extent that it had a coherent logic—was something like the following: The suffering, even death, of the weak at the hands of the strong is an example of "survival of the fittest." And surely the "survival of the fittest" has God's blessing. After all, He built the dynamic into His great creative process, natural selection. And how do we know that natural selection is God's handiwork? Because of its inexorable tendency to create organisms as majestic as ourselves, organisms worthy of admission to Heaven. In short, biological progressivism was used to deify nature in all its aspects, and nature, thus deified, was invoked in support of oppression.

This variant of social Darwinism—which infers political and moral values from the direction of evolution—has been essentially dead for a long time,

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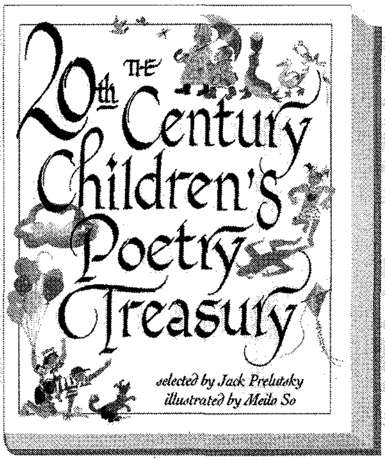
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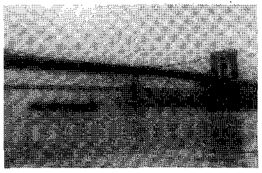

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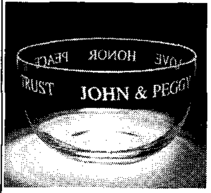

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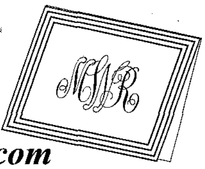
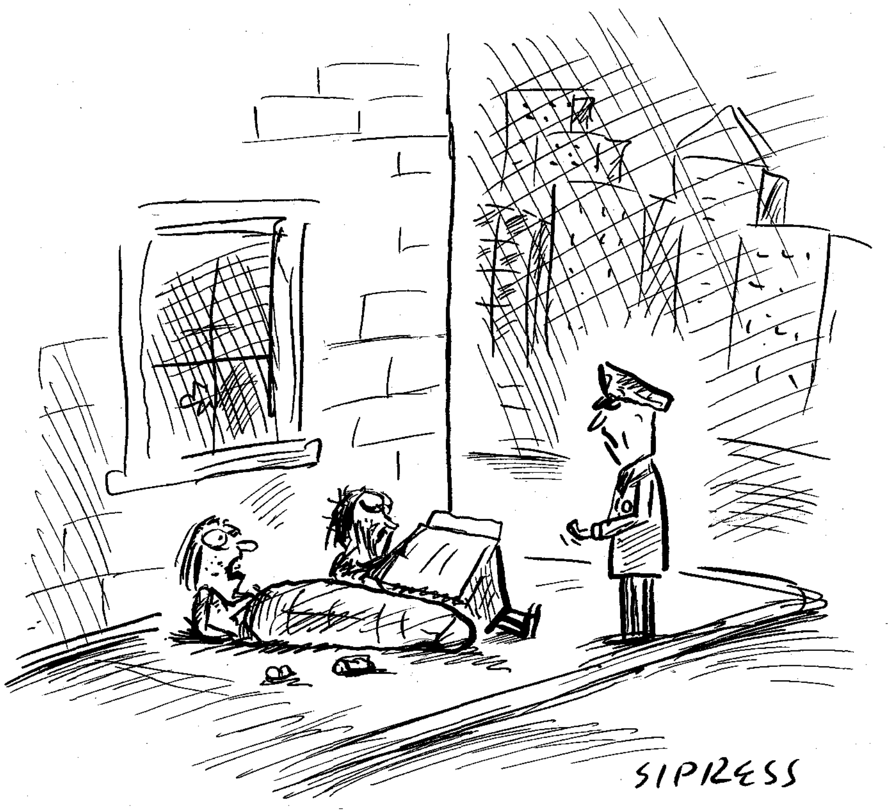




"But we're not homeless. We're on a camping trip."

• •

but for Gould it is still an ever-present enemy. His denunciations of progressivism often include dark allusions to the political values that accompanied it in the early twentieth century. His war against progressivism, it seems, is waged partly to vanquish a religious right that died out long ago. Yet the effect of the war is to give aid and comfort to a new religious right.

Anti-progressivism is the grand unifying theme in Gould's œuvre. To the lay reader, he may seem a man of many theories, but, time and again, they amount to the argument that natural selection, far from being a tireless engineer of organic improvement, is actually an erratic agent that is often swamped by outside factors, and so can't be counted on to push evolution upward. Hence his championing of "punctuated equilibrium"—the idea that evolution proceeds in fits and starts, and spends much of its time moving nowhere in particular. Hence, too, his insistence that many parts of plants and animals are not "adaptations" (things designed by natural selection for a particular purpose) but "spandrels" (incidental by-products of past evolution which may happen to serve a function but weren't originally "selected" for that function).

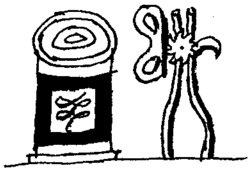
Neither of these claims is wholly wrong. Both—in moderate form, at least—were embraced by some Darwinians long before Gould came along and applied new labels to them. But Gould bills these retreads as fresh and radical, and his rhetorical extravaganzas then become priceless assets for creationists. In depicting himself as the torch carrier for "a new and general theory of evolution," he once declared standard Darwinian theory—the so-called modern synthesis that had crystallized by mid-century—"effectively dead, despite its persistence as textbook orthodoxy." Not surprisingly, this sound bite is endlessly repeated by such writers as Michael Denton, whose book "Evolution: A Theory in Crisis" is a favorite of creationists.

Gould was widely criticized for pronouncing Darwinism dead, and he has long since qualified the claim. But the fact remains that he made the statement, it was silly, and it had consequences. When an interviewer asked Phillip Johnson how he came to suspect that Darwinism lacked scientific merit, he said that reading Gould's claim had been a formative experience.

Gould's writings on punctuated equilibrium have been a particular gift to creationists. He dwells on gaps in the fossil record to argue that evolution works fitfully; creationists then quote him to argue that it doesn't work at all. (They love the conspiratorial aura of Gould's description of these gaps as the "trade secret of paleontology.")

Obviously, we can't hold scholars strictly responsible for how their words are used. There *are* lots of gaps in the fossil record, and though many biologists believe that Gould cites the record too selectively, it isn't his fault when creationists quote him dishonestly, as they sometimes do. The problem is that often they don't have to. The biochemist Michael Behe writes, in the anti-evolutionist text "Darwin's Black Box," "Gould has argued that the rapid rate of appearance of new life forms demands a mechanism other than natural selection for its explanation." Gould does say that, when he depicts punctuated equilibrium as a major new concept, requiring "additional laws," beyond natural selection.

This particular excess has drawn criticism from Gould's mentor, the renowned biologist Ernst Mayr. In his book "Toward a New Philosophy of Biology" Mayr insists that any plausible version of punctuated equilibrium is "completely consistent" with the modern Darwinian synthesis, and that the engine of change in punctuated equilibrium is natural selection. Mayr should know. He, more than anyone else, created the theory of punctuated equilibrium, decades before Gould gave it that catchy title.



Of all the Gouldian themes cherished by Darwinism's detractors, perhaps the most interesting is one publicized by Johnson in the early nineteen-nineties, in an *Atlantic Monthly* essay and in his book "Darwin on Trial." Johnson's argument began with the accurate observation that species often go extinct because of what you might call bad luck, not bad genes. For example, a meteor may strike and trigger an environmental cataclysm, wiping out thousands of species that, only the day before, seemed ideally suited to life on earth.

Johnson then asked: If which genes perish is so often determined randomly, how could natural selection work well? Isn't the idea supposed to be that, while genetic traits are *generated* randomly, they are weeded out selectively, depending on whether they are "fit"?

That is indeed how natural selection designs fit organisms. But, according to mainstream Darwinian theory, most of the consequential weeding out doesn't happen conspicuously and suddenly, when whole species go extinct; it happens on a day-to-day basis within a species, as some individuals fail to spread their genes as ably as other individuals. So even if every few hundred million years a meteor strikes, wiping out lots of well-designed species, other well-designed species remain, and the design work continues.

Maybe Johnson's mistake was to use Gould as a source. Gould has repeatedly stressed the randomness of great species extinctions, and emphasized selection *among* species, while underplaying day-to-day selection within species. Indeed, Johnson's book cited Gould on all three of those themes. ("As usual," he wrote, "Gould is the most interesting commentator.")

RANDOM extinctions are a central theme of Gould's book "Wonderful Life." In using them to assault the notion of evolutionary progress, he took a different tack from Johnson's, but in the end he was no more successful.

The book is about the fossils of the Burgess Shale, products of an apparently sudden (as these things go) expansion of biological diversity around five hundred and seventy million years ago, at the beginning of the Cambrian Period. The subsequent history of the Shale animals, Gould argued, illustrates how radically bad luck can alter evolution's course. In particular, some very weird-looking Shale creatures had fallen prey to an essentially random mass extinction, and left no descendants. If not for this bad break, today's tree of life would presumably look very different.

Since Gould's book was published, his interpretation of these fossils has been challenged by a number of paleontologists. It now seems that the Burgess Shale animals weren't nearly so weird as Gould and some other researchers first thought; many fit readily into a standard taxonomic tree, and their descendants are

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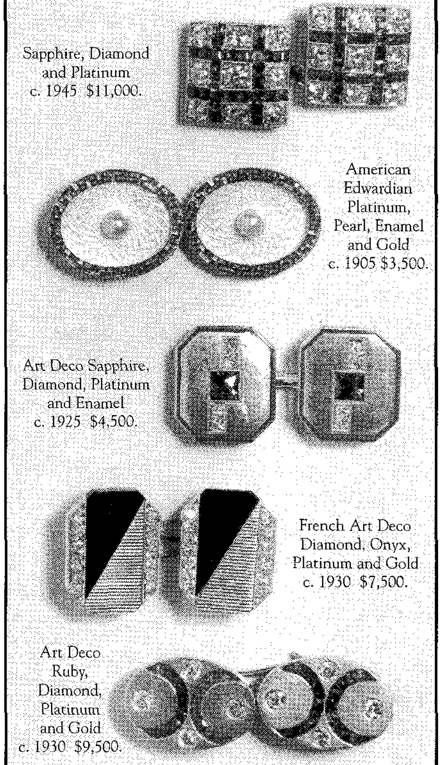

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VILLE ET VILLAGE

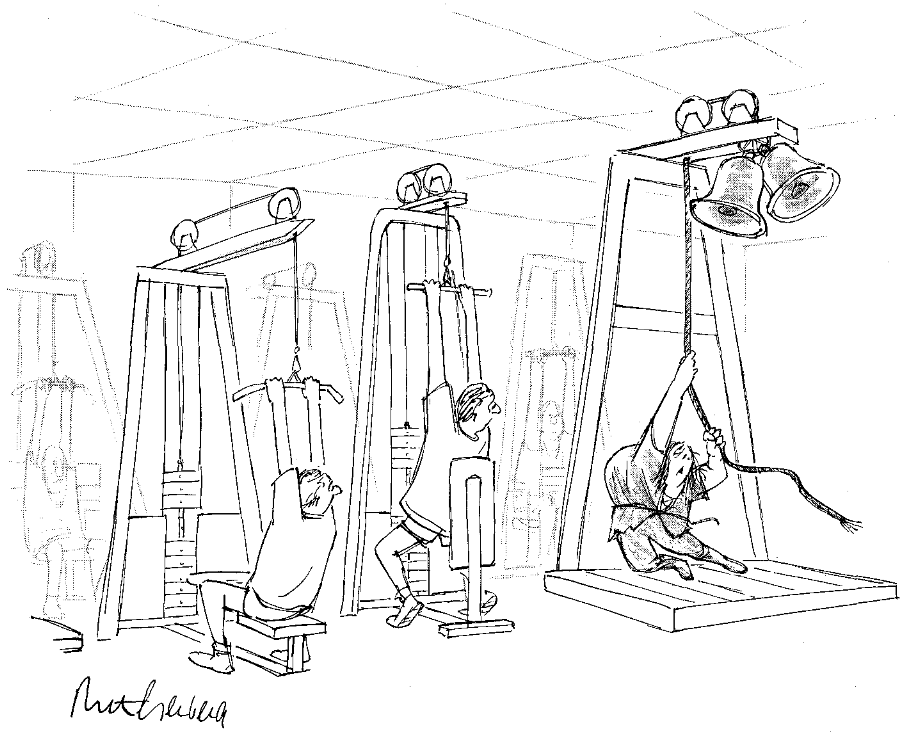
with us still. In the case of a fossil so bizarre-looking that it was named *Hallucigenia*, Gould—following the then prevailing interpretation—seems to have been looking at it upside down. Those baffling squiggly things on its "back" were legs. And those strangely spiky "legs" *were* spikes—armor, presumably the product of an arms race.

Still, Gould's premise is valid. Whether or not the Burgess Shale animals are a case in point, species do go extinct because of cosmic rolls of the dice. A meteor shows up and—*poof!*—no dinosaurs. But Gould's argument from this premise blurs the line between two separate issues: the question of whether a given species was likely to evolve and the question of whether the properties it embodies were likely to evolve.

For example, if our ancestors had been wiped out through bad luck, then, as Gould has repeatedly proclaimed, human beings would never have evolved. This point—in some ways the central point of "Wonderful Life"—is so unarguable that, as far as I know, it has never been argued against. No sober biologist would claim that there was some kind of inexorability to the evolution of *Homo sapiens* per se: a species five or six feet tall with ear lobes, bad jokes, and all the rest. The question is whether the evolution of *some* form of highly intelligent life was likely all along. In his first book on directionality, Gould simply skirted the question; in the second, he declared the answer to be no. The problem with this answer goes beyond Gould's overlooking arms races. The broader issue is what you might call natural selection's genius.

Though natural selection is a blind process that works by trial and error—and random trial, at that—it has a remarkable knack for invention, for finding and filling empty niches. It doesn't just invent great technologies; it keeps reinventing them. Flight and eyesight are two properties so amazing that creationists cite them for their implausibility. Yet flight has arisen through evolution on at least three separate occasions, and eyes have developed independently dozens of times.

Eyes are so favored by natural selection because light is a terrific medium of perception. It moves in straight lines, bounces off solid things, and travels faster than anything in the known universe. But smell, sound, touch, and taste are also amply represented in the animal kingdom, and are just the beginning of a long list of organic data-gathering technologies. Indeed, humankind's vaunted twentieth-century advances in sensory technology seem almost like a long exercise in reinventing the wheel. We now have infrared sensors for night vision; rattlesnakes beat us to that one. We use sonar—old hat to bats and dolphins. Some burglar alarms work by creating electric fields and sensing disturbances in them; so do some fish,



such as the elephant-snout fish of Africa.

Why is natural selection so attentive to sensory technologies? Because they facilitate adaptively flexible behavior. And what else does that? The ability to process all this sensory data and adjust behavior accordingly. In other words: brains—that is, intelligence as an abstract property. It is natural selection's demonstrable affinity for certain properties—its tendency to invent them and nurture them independently in myriad species—which renders trivial Gould's truism about how bad luck can wipe out any one species or group of species. The fates of particular species may depend on the luck of the draw. But the properties they embody were in the cards—at least, in the sense that the deck was stacked heavily in their favor.

Consider some properties of human intelligence which are often taken as defining assets of our species, such as language and the inventive use of tools. Though no species is nearly as accomplished as ours in either realm, primitive versions of these features are widespread.

The most obvious examples of tool use come from our close relatives, chimpanzees. Chimps pound nuts open with sticks and stones. They take twigs, strip them of leaves, poke them into termite nests, then pull them out and eat the termites. Some chimps even use sticks to brush each other's teeth. This sort of thing doesn't seem to be narrowly programmed by the genes. There is innovation and then emulation. In other words, there is cultural evolution—the selective transmission of nongenetic information from animal to animal.

Animals also can be surprisingly articulate. East African vervet monkeys have several warning calls, depending on the predator: one means "snake," one means "eagle," and one means "leopard," and each elicits an apt response (looking down, looking up, or running into the bush). Mastery of this language takes cultural fine-tuning. Young vervets may look up, see a pigeon, and give the "eagle" call. Adults then look up and, by failing to join in the call, induce an enlightening chagrin.

Of course, no nonhuman species is about to embark on the sort of cultural evolution that got us from the Stone Age to the sophisticated technology of the information age. None of these animals could possibly formulate a message as complex as "Have you tried just turning it off and then turning it on again and seeing if that solves the problem?"

Still, they may not be as far from that utterance as they seem. For at some point, with the accumulation of tools and other forms of culture, culture itself can become an accelerator of genetic evolution. As those individuals best at manipulating culture reproduce more successfully than their neighbors, genes for deft intellect spread faster. This, in turn, speeds up cultural evolution, which further speeds up genetic evolution, and so on: yet another form of progressive evolution via positive feedback. In our lineage, this "co-evolution" of genes and culture may have acquired momentum with the first handcrafted stone tools, more than two million years ago, when the brains of our ancestors were only half the size of modern brains.

Many biologists believe that human social organization has also favored genes for intelligence. Our species, for example, has "reciprocal altruism." We are designed to feel warmly toward people who do favors for us, to return the favors, and thus to forge mutually beneficial relationships—friendships. What's more, one kind of favor we swap is social support. That is, we are a "coalitional" species; groups compete with each other for status and influence. Reciprocal altruism takes brainpower—to remember who has helped you and who has hurt you. And the coalitional variety takes more brainpower, since strategic plotting and communication among allies are vital.

Here again, the basic ingredients are not peculiar to us. Vampire bats have reciprocal altruism; they'll donate painstakingly gathered blood to a needy friend, who will return the favor when fortunes are reversed. And vampire bats have bigger forebrains—the locus of much "social" intelligence—than other bats.

As for the richer form of reciprocal altruism, coalitional contention, it turns out not to be confined to such famously political animals as chimpanzees. Bottlenosed dolphins even form coalitions of coalitions. Team X of male dolphins will help team Y vanquish team Z, and, later, team Y will return the favor. Since victory brings sex, skill in coalition-building is an obvious candidate for an arms race among dolphins.

All told, if you look at the foundations of human intelligence—tool use, language, reciprocal altruism, coalitional

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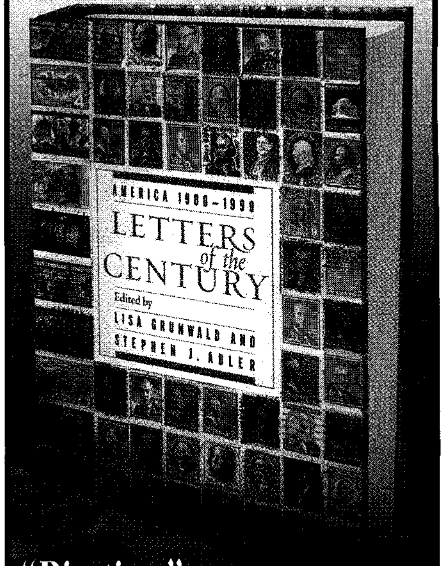

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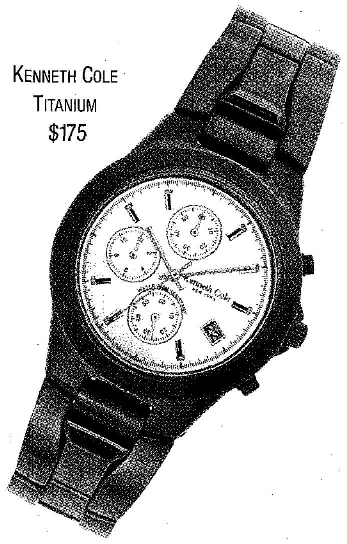

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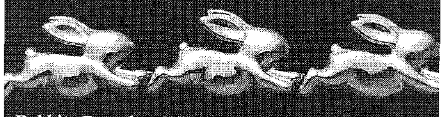

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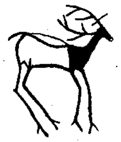

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THE ONE TO WORRY ABOUT

I failed miserably at imagining nothing.
Something always came to keep me company:
A small nameless bug crossing the table,
The memory of my mother, the ringing in my ear.
I was distracted and perplexed.
A hole is invariably a hole in something.

About seven this morning, a lone beggar
Waited for me with his small, sickly dog,
Whose eyes grew bigger on seeing me.
There goes, the eyes said, that nice man
To whom (appearances to the contrary),
Nothing in this whole wide world is sacred.

I was still a trifle upset entering the bakery
When an unknown woman stepped out
Of the back to wait on me dressed for a night
On the town in a low-cut, tight-fitting black dress.
Her face was solemn, her eyes averted,
While she placed a muffin in my hand,
As if all along she knew what I was thinking.

—Charles Simic

contention, and others—you can find them, if in primitive form, scattered far and wide across the animal kingdom. Given evolution's tendency to generate more and more species, to elevate complexity, and to keep inventing and reinventing technologies, the eventual combination of these foundational properties in a single species was likely all along.

Gould writes, "Humans are here by the luck of the draw." Undeniably true. But there's a difference between saying it took great luck for you to be the winner and saying it took great luck for there to be a winner. This is the distinction off which lotteries, casinos, and bingo parlors make their money. In the game of evolution, I submit, it was just a matter of time before one species or another raised its hand (or, at least, its grasping appendage) and said, "Bingo!"

This thesis, though little publicized, is not radical. Some noted biologists, such as William D. Hamilton and Edward O. Wilson, believe that the evolution of great intelligence was likely from the start.

Hamilton's work also suggests another interesting likelihood. He was the first to rigorously explain the evolution of family bonds—that is, "kin-selected altruism." In the human species, with its complex emotions, such altruism entails love and empathy. What's more, these warm feelings were expanded by the advent of reciprocal altruism so that we are now capable of empathizing with people we're not related to. Since natural selection has invented both kinds of altruism numerous times, it is not too wild to suggest that this expansive sentiment was probable all along.

This prospect—that evolution's directionality may have a "moral" dimension—helps explain why some religiously inclined people find progressivism intriguing. Obviously, this theme wouldn't sell the creationists themselves on Darwinism; if you think that Genesis is literally true, evolution will always be your enemy. But, in the battle between Darwinians and creationists for the hearts and minds of the uncommitted, it matters whether evolution by natural selection is spiritually suggestive.

Even if you accept the arguments for directionality, and agree that intelligence and even love were likely from the start, that is hardly overwhelming evidence of a higher purpose. But it's closer to it than Gould's version of evolution—a stumbling, bumbling process that just happened to lead, Mr. Magoo-like, to Einstein, Mother Teresa, and the Internet.

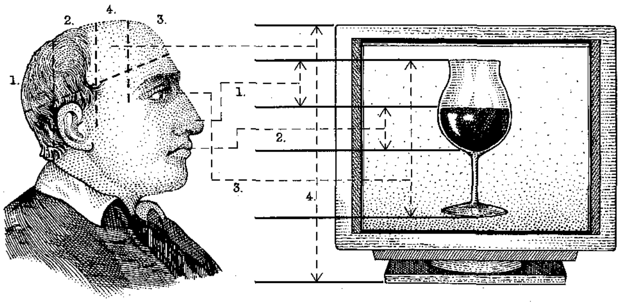
Some Darwinians flirt with deism, the no-frills faith that was favored during the Enlightenment precisely for its compatibility with science. In this view, God set cosmic history in motion and then adopted a hands-off policy, confident that it would lead to something interesting. Certainly, history *has* led to something interesting. Who knows? Maybe the present moment—when an intelligent form of life starts to collectively, deliberately shape the whole biosphere's destiny—was itself, in some statistical sense, destiny.

But, really, how consoling could any Darwinian god be? Those who would like to believe in a higher power that is both omnipotent and benign will be frustrated by the most casual inspection of the medium of our design. Among the key ingredients in natural selection's creative energy are death and suffering, the casting aside of the "unfit." And, for every bit of love and harmony, there seems to be a flip side of antagonism and cruelty; among the things we do for loved ones is hate their enemies. What kind of god would use natural selection as a creative tool?

It is tempting to answer as the biologist George Williams has: a very bad god. On the other hand, a smart, reflective species with a capacity for empathy could be capable of greater things than we've seen. Maybe human behavior will someday justify a theology rather like that of the ancient Manichaeans: maybe nature, though dominated by darkness, has always contained seeds of light, seeds of intellect and love, which over the ages grow until they transcend their base embodiment.

In any event, to note the ample dark side of evolution is simply to re-state the problem that any honest religion must confront: the problem of evil. And solving timeless theological quandaries is beyond Darwinism's job description. My point is just that Darwinism needn't put theologians out of a job. Granted, it may force them to abandon beliefs. Scientific progress, as the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote, has long spurred the amendment of religious doctrine—"to the great advantage of religion"—while religion's essence remained intact. For many religious people, part of that essence is the belief that, above and beyond the vestigial cruelties and absurdities of the human experience, there is a point to it all, a point that, even if obscure, may yet become manifest. So far, biological science has provided no reason to conclude otherwise. ◆

It's not as complicated as you think.



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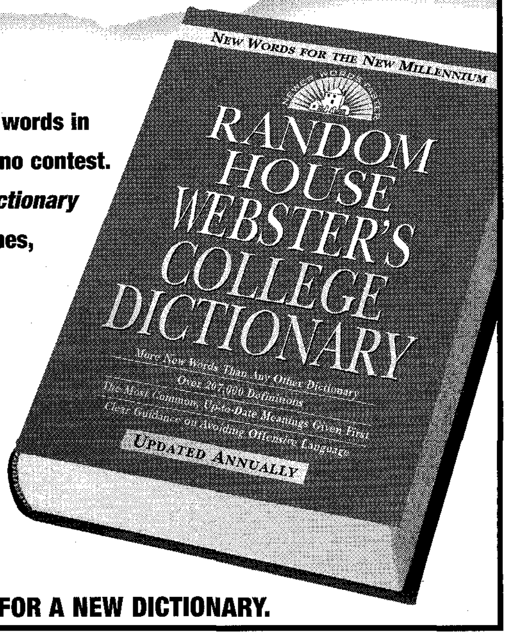
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PERSONAL HISTORY

LETTERS BETWEEN FATHER AND SON

The father wanted desperately to be a writer; so he taught his son how to be one. The son wanted desperately to be a writer; so he taught his father as well.

BY V. S. NAIPAUL

Seepersad Naipaul, the father of the novelist and travel writer V. S. Naipaul, was a journalist for the Trinidad Guardian and the author of a collection of stories, "Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales." In 1950, when this correspondence begins, the elder Naipaul had also started writing stories for "Caribbean Voices," a new radio program directed by Henry Swanzy, of the BBC's World Service. Swanzy, V. S. Naipaul recalls, was a liberating presence in provincial Trinidad. He "had standards and enthusiasm. He took local writing seriously and lifted it above the local and the BBC paid." And from 1950 to 1953, "with the stimulus of that weekly radio programme from London, my father, I believe, found his voice as a writer, developed his own comic gift, and wrote his best stories."

V. S. Naipaul was not at home to witness this development. At the age of sixteen, he won a government scholarship to study in England, and attended Oxford University. His sister Kamla was also abroad, in India, studying at the Benares Hindu University. Father, elder son, and elder daughter remained in touch by mail—over a three-year period writing more than five hundred letters, from which the edited selection that follows has been drawn.

62 Westbere Road
London, NW 2
September 15, 1950

My Dear Kamla,

I think you will be glad to know that I am absolutely happy. The only thing I need to make me feel the happiest man on earth is a girl; but what can I do? Nobody could ever like me: and I am despairing of myself.

To recapitulate what I have written in about half a dozen letters.

1. The Gov't was offering me a passage on September 19th. This was ridiculous. I would have got here the day before my term opened. So I decided to fly to New York and then take a ship to England. The government said: "We are only offering you $464. Your trip costs $538, excluding the cost of your stay in New York. You will have to pay the difference." I was so desperate that I said yes. But how I was relieved when they finally decided to pay everything.

2. I was scared. I had never been on my own before. The idea of passing a night in a strange city and boarding a boat was terrifying. By seven on the morning of August 1st I was packed and ready to go. I didn't feel like shedding a tear. I had to be at the airport at eight-thirty. [I then] learned that the plane was delayed. I was mad. I refused to believe. But it was so. So I kicked my heels in anguish. The waiting room was swarming with people who had come not to see me off but to see the airport. But the plane did come on time and at about twelve-fifty V. S. Naipaul was cut off from all family ties. I was scared, not unhappy, scared because I feared New York. Yet my fear passed away.

I began to enjoy myself.

Now read on, darling.

Every moment of that day and that flight is imprinted on my mind. I can recall the faces of the stewards and stewardesses, the meals, the passengers.

At about 12 midnight we were over New York, acres of lights strung in asterisks mottled with red and green and blue. We grounded at twelve-thirty, and I got a letter from the British Consulate, instructing me to go to a certain hotel.

I took a taxi, felt like a lord at the hotel when a black porter took my luggage in, calling me "sir" every two or three words. It quite took my breath away. I was free and I was honoured. I was deeply happy. Freedom and desire achieved are sublime.

I got to the hotel at about two. I was about to go to a restaurant for a meal when I remembered that I had a whole baked chicken with me—my darling mother looks after her children with all the poor little love she can dispose of—and I dumped the roti (wrapped in paper) in the wastebasket and ate chicken and a banana, and drank ice-cold water. What the maid said on the following day when she emptied the basket I don't know, nor do I particularly care to.

3. *Voyage* was very pleasant. I made several friends. A German woman (married & with husband aboard), whom I think I would have kissed, with ample coöperation from her, has invited me to Germany. I think I will go next year.

4. *England* has been proving very pleasant.

5. *Girls*—I met two. One I knew and saw for three days, took her to St. Paul's and Regent's Park; but she has packed me up. She wants to be faithful to her boyfriend.

Girl No. 2 was a Norwegian I met on a train to Oxford. We did some sightseeing together and I paid her the wildest compliments in French, vowed eternal love and wrote the torridest love letter (in French) I think I have ever written. She went back to Norway last Saturday. I think I will go to Norway this Christmas. She was very nice.

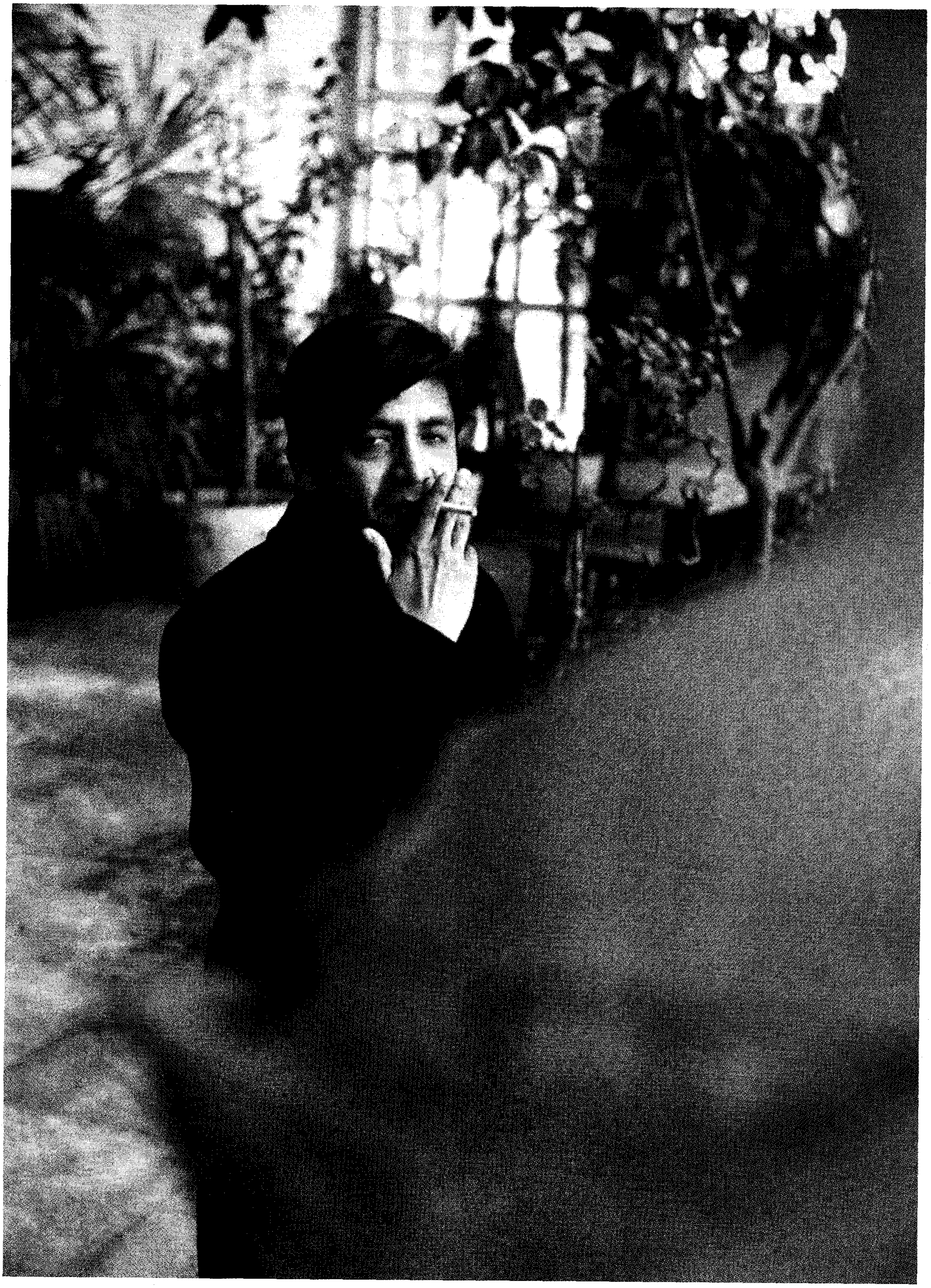
Your ever loving
Vido

Home
October 5, 1950
7 P.M.

My Dear Vido,

It must be now about 11 P.M. in England. Your first day in the University must have long finished. I am both

TRISTRAM POWELL/V. S. NAIPAUL PAPERS/COURTESY DEPT. OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF TULSA



V. S. Naipaul in London: "The boys like me because mine is a 'cynical flamboyance,' because I pose as an 'enfant terrible.'"

curious and anxious to know how Oxford reacted to you; or how you reacted to Oxford. Send me a detailed pen-picture of the day. Got your letter, got one from Kamla, too. Both yours and hers came yesterday. So far so good. . . . I think you are yielding yourself to needless worry about writing. I think you will have your hands filled with a lot of work at Oxford; and in any case you are hardly likely to find time to do any writing for money for a long time to come.

Don't be scared of being an artist. D. H. Lawrence was an artist through and through; and for the time being, at any rate, you should think as Lawrence. Remember what he used to say: "Art for my sake. If I *want* to write, I write—and if I don't want to, I won't." Long years ago, when I was about fourteen or sixteen, I felt much as you are feeling now: eager to write, but writing in a kind of vacuity—utterly fictitious efforts, because what I wrote, or tried to write, had nothing to do with flesh and blood. Now I know that if I am writing about Rapooche [a nickname of his older brother, Persad], I am for the moment Rapooche himself. It's a matter of impersonation, I think, the kind of thing an actor does. This, I think, is the secret of getting to the inside of things. The mere fact that you are conscious of this lack shows that you're on the right track. Well, all this is perhaps too much preaching; and I don't know whether I have succeeded in telling you what I wanted to say.

One cannot write well unless one can think well; only, in writing fiction one must be able to think as the character would think in given circumstances.

Do not be too anxious. Your time is coming. But please make up your mind in advance that there might be lots and lots of rejections before you "arrive."

Since you left home I have had a few first-rate stories in the Sunday *Guardian*. One on "What the peasants think about the election" was particularly good. Even the British Council told me what a fine article it was, and that there is need for more such writings. But now I despair of writing many articles for the Weekly. Not time, really. The work on the *Guardian* takes all out of me.

Do send me a copy of R. K. Narayan's "Mr. Sampath." The book is very favourably spoken of in "The Year's Work in Literature, 1949," an annual publication of the British Council. Narayan is spoken of as "the most delightful Indian novelist writing in English . . . in a way which no English writer of our time can rival." I shall refund you the money. Also "The Authors' Handbook" (The Bodley Head). This is the time I should be writing the things I so long to write. This is the time for me to be myself. When shall I get the chance? I don't know. I come from work, dead tired. The *Guardian* is taking it all out of me, writing tosh. What price salted fish and things of that sort. Actually, that is my assignment for tomorrow! It hurts. . . . Now, keep your chin up, and, far more important: keep yourself out of mischief.

Love from Ma and all,
PA

Seepersad Naipaul outside the family home in Trinidad: "If you write me letters about things and people at Oxford, I could compile them in a book."

V. S. NAIPAUL PAPERS

University College, Oxford
October 12

DEAR EVERYBODY,

What a delight to receive Pa's excellent letter from home. If I didn't know the man, I would have said what a delightful father to have. He really writes extremely good letters.

It is now twelve noon. I have just returned from a tutorial, a weekly one-hour lesson with my tutor. I wrote an essay on "King Lear," which he described as very pleasantly written and trenchantly argued.

The people here accept me. I have quite a number of acquaintances, and to meet people I have joined about half a dozen societies. I have written quite a number of poems since I left home, and I find material coming in floods to me. Thought and deep emotion are really all that one requires for poetry besides, of course, a feel for words. When I was in London, I had one of my poems read by a writer whose novel was published last year. He liked it, especially the following lines:

In a yellowing world
Of yellow leaves
And yellowing men.

Beautiful words force themselves on you in this delightful climate. Listen to this. Read it aloud. I was trying to capture the sound of a racing train:

noisy trains
clangorously clattering
towards nothing.

I don't care what anyone says, that is a really excellent line.

You've got to know that Oxford is a collection of more than twenty colleges. The atmosphere of this college is more of a club than anything else. There is the Junior Common Room, where the students meet and drink and smoke and talk. I have got to learn how to dance. The lectures are dull and uninformative. You are not obliged to attend them or write essays. You can do no work at all, if that is your inclination. It would surprise you to see the vast flock of people reading English. Most want to become writers.

I am going out after this letter to see about the book Pa wants. It is slowly becoming colder and colder. I shall soon start wearing my overcoat. Up to now I have been sticking to the unlined rubber raincoat. Please don't call a raincoat a cloak. England is teaching me to say thank you and please.

The beauty of Oxford grows on you.

Incidentally, I have a favour. Could you send me a carton of cigarettes? Everyone here smokes and everyone offers you, and I have fallen back into the habit. But don't be horrified. But please send the cigarettes. They are so expensive here.

Your loving son
(and brother to the rest)
VIDIA

October 22

DEAR VIDO,

Your letters are charming in their spontaneity. If you could write me letters about things and people—especially people—at Oxford, I could compile them in a book: "Letters Between Father and Son," or "My Oxford Letters." What think you? If you can bring the same quality of spontaneity to whatever you write, everything you write will have a sparkle. I believe this free flow in one's written thought is due largely to an absence of anxiety. I know because it happens to me. Whenever I allow myself to become too anxious to please the person I am writing to or the person I am writing for, I generally lose balance and spoil everything. The result is bound to be a stilted business. Don't care to please any person but yourself. Only see that you succeed in saying exactly what you want to say without showing off—with utter, brave sincerity—and you will achieve style because you will have been yourself. If in the chase for clarity you have to ignore a rule of grammar, ignore it. If for the sake of euphony you must use a long word, use it. My goodness! What do you think literature boils down to? To writing from the belly rather than from the cheek. Most people write from the cheek. That's why Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is great. That's why Gandhi's writing is great.

Yep! I am a contradiction; but I think I am in good company. Of Bacon it is said, "His moral character was singularly mixed." Yet it is commonly accepted that the intellect of Bacon "was one of the most powerful and searching ever possessed by man." And look at Goldsmith: "He wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll." Then there's Boswell, the man who was laughed at by the company he sought; the company he later adorned by writing the greatest biography ever written. It seems to me that it wasn't what these fellows were outwardly that mattered; it was the other self that they could summon. The mood they could put themselves in—that made them write how and what they wrote. Mohammed dictating the Koran in a trance—don't think it was a real trance—was not the Mohammed awake. Mood again. In a moment one can make oneself whatever one wants oneself to be. No wonder William James speaks of man's many selves. I think he is right. You may call to service your writing self; or you may call your politician self, or your conniving self, or your poet self, or your mystic self, or your saint self. So it seems to me.

Very sorry, but your Ma has just found out that customs regulations make it extremely difficult to send away things like cigarettes. It can't be done. Still, I'll make more inquiries; for it seems to me the thing should not be so.

Don't forget to send me the Narayan novel "Mr. Sampath."

What about your colds? Have you had any attacks? Let us know. Everything and everybody O.K.

Love from all
PA

November 22

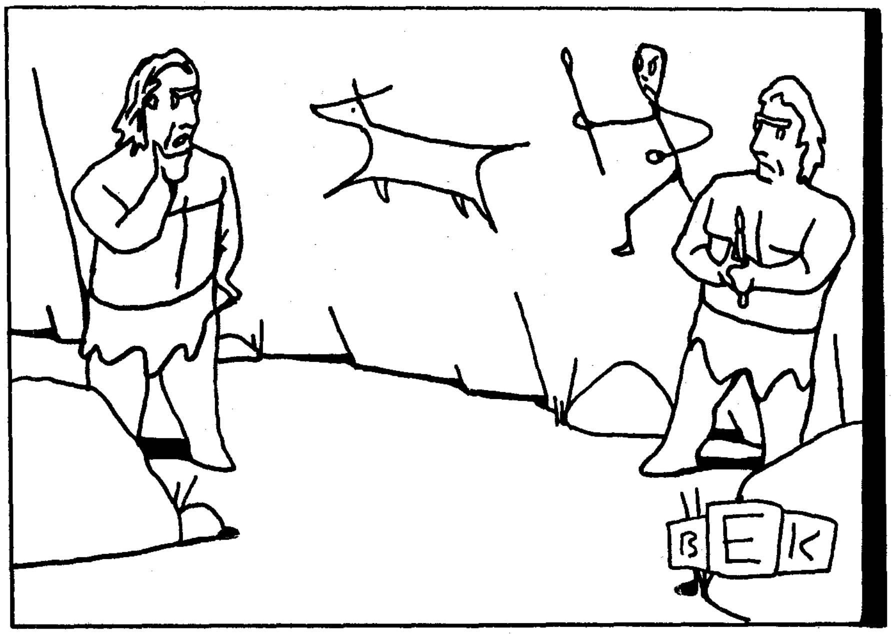
MY DEAR KAMLA,

I have no news, my dear, none whatever. I have been working very hard, but not as hard as I wanted. A feeling of emptiness is nearly always on me. I see myself struggling in a sort of tunnel blocked up at both ends. My past—Trinidad and the necessity of our parents—lies behind me and I am powerless to help anyone. My future—such as it is—is a full four years away.

My dear girl, my allowance is barely enough for myself. I smoke too much; but don't write home about that. I will do my best to send home £5 for Christmas, but I will only be sure after I have settled with the College Authorities. I am prepared to do some hack writing for anyone who would care to pay for it, and next term I will write some articles for the *Guardian* and try to get some of my stories published over here. I speak of "some." Actually, I have written only two but I have been engaged on a novel. It is about eight chapters gone—about a hundred and forty pages in any Penguin book; but it is only in a very rough form. I shall not touch it again until the end of next term. I am exhausted. I want new ideas to incubate a bit. I shall have it complete in a year's time. And think what will become of me if it is published! For I am sure of one thing once it is published: it is bound to sell. It is a humorous novel.

And now, about girls. I have conducted two highly unsuccessful love affairs this term. Only yesterday I rounded off one in a romantic way. The first girl—a Belgian and the most beautiful thing you ever saw—tolerated me for three weeks. Then she suddenly told me she couldn't come to tea. I was taken aback and deeply hurt. It appears that one of the stories I had shown her was, in her view, pornographic. Anyway, she packed me up and sent me the most beautiful letter I have ever had from a woman. I shall quote: "My dear Vidia," (she wrote), "I shall never forgive myself for hurting you and for this being the blackest day in my life but do understand it's not only that in society one must not accept your offense, which I myself forgive with all my heart; it is also and above all, as I tried to tell you, that I'm in love with another. I hate myself for the hours of pain I have caused you etc. etc." . . .

Good! Not bad, eh? Imagine—your own brother, just turned eighteen but lying to every girl that he is twenty-two, drawing that letter from a girl after whom nearly everybody in the English class is rushing! I think the other chap was a better poet. The other woman, who has been having four-hour teas with me



"Maybe you could make the hunter more likable."

• •

once a week, is English and very stupid and I am relieved to be rid of her.

Goodbye now, my dearest Kamla, and keep well and don't write letters like the one above, because, you see, I *lied* to that girl.

Yours,
VIDO

London
December 11

DEAR EVERYBODY,

For the past two days, I have been thinking more and more about home. I told Boyzee [a cousin] this, and he told me that the reason was probably that Christmas is not far off. I wonder. Christmas never meant much to me or to any one of our family. It was always so much of a glorious feeling of fun we felt existed somewhere, but we could never feel where it was. We were always on the outside of a vague feeling of joy. The same feeling is here with me in London. Yet there is so much more romance here. It gets dark at about half past three and all the lights go on. The shops are bright, the streets are well lit and full of people. I walk through the streets, yet am so much alone, so much on the outside of this great festive feeling.

But I was thinking of home. I could visualise every detail of everything I knew—the bit of the gate, for instance, that was broken off, the oleander tree, and the withering roses. Sometimes the sound of a car starting in the road rouses me.

The uncertain hesitant beat of the engine brings back No. 26 to me, smells and all. It makes me feel sad. Don't misunderstand. It makes me think about you people in a way I thought of you only rarely at home.

And then, for some inexplicable reason, it makes me think of the early morning in the New York hotel. Eating large chunks of baked chicken—the most I had ever eaten at one sitting in my life. It was good, but oh, how dry, and there was nothing to wash it down with; even the oranges provided little moisture, and I had given away the bananas to a woman who had two children on the plane. Goodness, they were giving off a smell! Generosity wasn't all that prompted me.

But do you know why I think of the chicken? You see, it made me feel how much you people felt and cared for me; and you can't realise how infinitely sad that feeling can make someone. One feels too weak to be caring about such a big responsibility—the responsibility of deserving affection.

Last week I had my first snow. It came down in little white fluffs; you felt that a gigantic hand had punched a gigantic cotton-wool sack open, letting down flurries of cotton shreds. Snow is just as you see it in films and in photographs. It snowed for about two hours. The streets were not covered, but the tops of the naked branches of the trees were white with it—a white that showed more beautiful because the limbs of the trees were stark black. The earth was carpeted with white. It is very light stuff. A Cow and Gate tin of it weighs less than a pound. The closest thing I have seen to it in Trinidad is the stuff that gathers in a refrigerator—not when it gets hard, though.

The meals here are quite different from home. Usually you start with soup. Then you have the main course. A bit of meat or fish, potatoes (I have eaten potatoes every day of my stay in England, twice a day at Oxford) and either cabbage or cauliflower. Then comes a sweet. Apple and custard or some such stuff. Finally, coffee. You would be surprised how you get accustomed to the coffee habit, after lunch and after dinner. No rice, and I don't miss it. No roti, and I don't miss it. You have bread with your soup, or with the main course. My table manners, which just didn't exist when I was in Trinidad, have improved tremendously. Another thing. The family always has dinner together. In Trinidad this would be impossible, I know.

Goodbye, and Merry Christmas.
With deep love from
VIDO

January 27, 1951

DEAR KAMLA,

For some queer reason, I find myself unable to concentrate. This term, I have cut out all social activities, try to pen myself in to do some work, feel I am doing little, and keep on feeling, too, that there is little to be done. I wonder. I really hope I pass this examination. I think I will. I just wish it were over, so that I could catch up on my reading and carry on with my novel.

I am a feature reporter on the staff of the university magazine *Isis*. It doesn't mean much, but if there is fair play I should become at least assistant news editor by the end of the year. You would be surprised when I told you that the majority of the students here are very stupid, and that the average intelligence is much lower than that of the sixth form of my years at Queen's Royal College.

At the beginning of this term, the boat-club people asked me if I would care to become a coxswain. I agreed, for it would be fun, I thought, to indulge in some form of outdoor activity. They tried me for a week, but I was pretty atrocious at coxing, so I have been dropped. And I am relieved. A coxswain is the smallest person in the boat. Yet he is in complete command, and is directly responsible for the lives of the crew, and the safety of the boat—slender shells, about sixty feet long and two wide, things which are so weak that a step on the wrong part would mean that the boat is destroyed. I don't mind terribly at being dropped. It merely means that I have discovered one more thing to be not good at.

Do you know? I got some Trinidad papers, read them, and found them hilariously absurd. I never realised before that the *Guardian* was so badly written, that our Trinidad worthies were so absurd, that Trinidad is the most amusing island that ever dotted a sea.

The English are a queer people. Take it from me. The longer you live in England, the queerer they appear. There is something so orderly, and yet so adventurous about them, so ruttish, so courageous. Take the chaps in the college. The world is crashing about their heads, about all our heads. Is their reaction as emotional as mine? Not a bit. They ignore it for the most part, drink, smoke, and imbibe shocking quantities of tea and coffee, read the newspapers and seem to forget what they have read.

Please keep me alive with letters. Write at least once a week. I shall do my best to keep up from this end.

Cheerio!
Vido

February 8

Dear Everybody,

Now, look here. I don't want any money from you at home. You know you can't spare it, and I can get along well enough without it. Don't send any money, until I ask. I have not asked for the past seven months, and I sincerely hope I never have cause to ask. Thanks very much, anyway, for the offer.

I would like to know whether all journalists are disgruntled people who nevertheless cling to their jobs, cursing them in the meanwhile, or whether this is merely a hereditary sign. This morning, I was in a white-hot temper, because the assistant news editor tampered with all three of my stories. The man tampered with the first paragraphs. From your advice, I had spent half my time thinking of a suitable opening. Take this, for instance. I interviewed Emeric Pressburger, the man who had made "Black Narcissus" and a number of other very good films, and asked him what he thought about the latest film he had made—"The Elusive Pimpernel." He said it was a lousy film. The president of the club to which Pressburger was talking afterward came round, asking me to kill that sentence. So, too, did the chairman of the Oxford Univ. Experimental Film Group. I naturally refused. I find few things as irritating as having people tell me what to put in or what to leave out. Anyway, I began my report " 'No, I am not happy over "The Elusive Pimpernel." I think it is a lousy film,' Mr. E. Pressburger told the *Isis* last Wednesday." And I headlined it "THE LOUSY PIMPERNEL." The fool changed the headline to "PRESSBURGER SPEAKS," and rewrote my paragraph. "E. Press. told the *Isis* last Wednesday, 'I am not happy . . .' He was speaking about the film he had made, and continued, 'I think it is a lousy film.' " Absurd change, isn't it?

Kamla tells me that Home has been completely revolutionised. Miss Satti [one of Naipaul's younger sisters] going out to dances as often as possible, and the girls wearing jeans. I am merely going to say I think it is just damned nonsense. I won't say any more, because Satti's feelings have to be considered. But put an end to this damned absurdity. Surely you can.

Incidentally, I had three stories in this week's *Isis*, covering almost a whole page. It is a great source of pleasure to attend people's talks and write 300 words that are as rounded and compact as a précis. At times I can criticise. When Palme Dutt, the half-Indian boss of the British Communist Party, came to Oxford, I gave him so much hell that the Communists rang up the editor and cursed him. I think a man is

IN A JUST WORLD
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doing his reporting well only when people start to hate him.

I haven't even begun to learn to dance. And even if I could dance I doubt whether I could get a girl to take to the dances—they are all so damned big here!

A girl student, two inches taller than myself, *Isis* Reporter Philippa Gerry (you can see her name in the copy of the paper you have), has invited me to spend a weekend at her home in Devonshire. She is hoping her mother will agree. I have talked it over with Philippa, and she assures me that at no stage will I be pulled into a corner by either parent and quizzed about my intentions. So don't worry! But I tell you everything, you see.

Vido

Blackpool, April 11

Dear Everybody,

I am writing this from Blackpool. Blackpool is the big Northern seaside resort of England. It is a big machine made to extort money from the people on holiday, full of fortune-tellers, Gypsies (all named Lee), eating places, and amusement shops. Of course, the season has not yet started, but you can walk along the front and see the machine being oiled for the season that begins, I am told, in June.

A Frenchman told me that we must feel sorry for the British. He says that they are influenced by their women, their seaside resorts, and their food. Their women can't cook, can't dress, and are invariably plain; their seaside resorts are damp, wet places, packed with thousands of people being sucked of their money. Take Blackpool. The beach is pleasant, as pleasant as Trinidad's east coast, minus the coconut trees, but the water and wind are hellishly cold, and the water is always the colour of mud. Their food, he says, is fish and chips (fried potato).

I hope Pa does write, even five hundred words a day. He should begin a novel. He should realise that the society of the West Indies is a very interesting one—one of phony sophistication. In the Sookhdeo bunch, he surely can see a novel. Describe the society just as it is—do not explain or excuse or laugh. I regret I did not go about more than I did. But if I had, well, perhaps I wouldn't have been here.

I think Pa's birthday has passed. My best regards, anyway. And to Ma I send my love.

University College, Oxford
April 14

My Darling Sister,

I got your letter a week ago. It came to me at Blackpool, where I have been staying with the family of a friend. I performed (that's the way I usually do things) no blunders. The family is the most Catholic I have ever lived with. They believe, and they believe with all their conviction. Surely there is nothing wrong with that. It has built up a wall around them, and it has made them secure, and they are not aware that what they believe is superficial and artificial. It has not made masters out of them.

I am at peace with the world. It is a humiliating peace, but I am trying to learn to accept it. I cannot tell you why, for it may break your heart. For you, I know, have always looked upon me as a sort of intellectual giant. Haven't you? But what happens when a man discovers that he has been lying to himself all the time? Everything I say or have said makes me ashamed of myself. I find myself posing even when I am sincere. Must people always go through this stage? I was seriously thinking this morning how people could ever put up with me. I wish I could see myself as people see me. Perhaps it would be the last straw. Or perhaps I am not as bad as I think myself to be?

The boys who like me, like me because mine is a "cynical flamboyance," because I pose as an "enfant terrible." Yet I sincerely am never aware of POSING. I suppose the reason is that in the W.I. we lived so completely within ourselves we grew to despise the people around us. *But the people ought to have been despised!* A friend told me the other day that people don't like me because I made them feel that I knew they were fools. What do you think of me? And don't tell me of your cousins. They are all asses, as you well know.

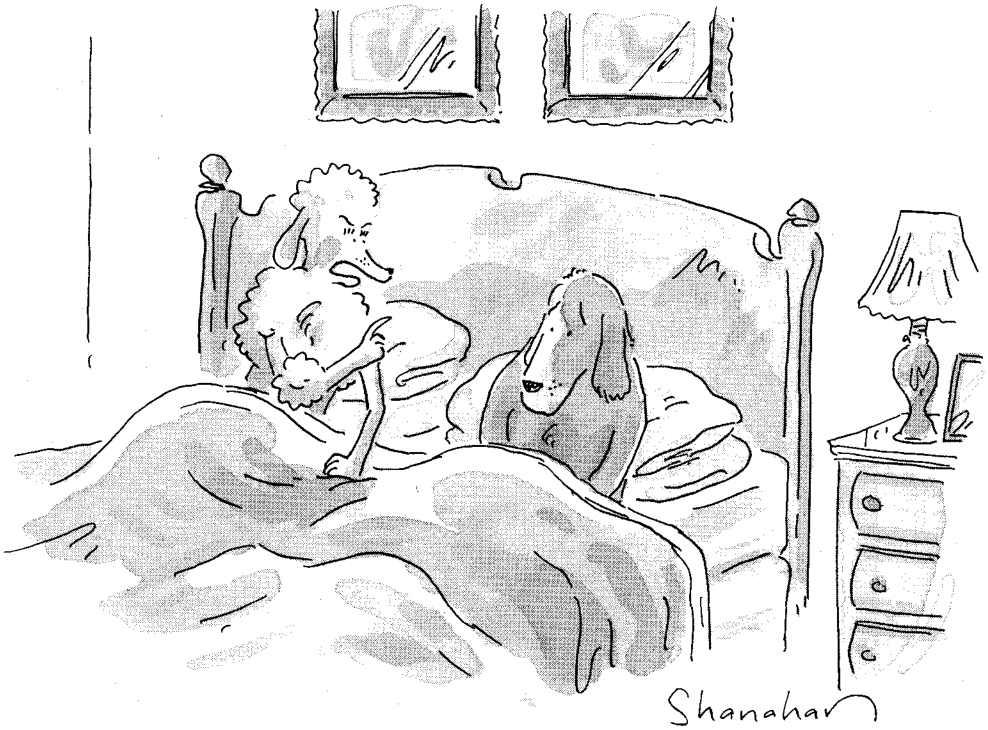
With all my love, my dear Kamla, from

Vido

Home
April 25

Dear Vido,

You say I should write at least five hundred words every day. Well, I have started to do so, but cannot say much just now. Let me first see how well the resolve works out. Even now I have not settled the question whether I should work on an autobiographical novel or whether I should exhume "Gurudeva."



"Bad sex! Bad, bad, bad sex!"

You should work away on your novel by all means. It takes years to arrive, however good one may be; and an early start, I need hardly remind you, is a great advantage. Read Conrad for intensity of expression, but for the most part be yourself.

About my short stories: I can count on at least eleven that are in hand. But the mere physical effort to type these is tedious and repellent. . . . I am often tired after work, and must be in a good mood to get back to work after work. It takes all the juice out of a fellow. So don't expect much from me. Another thing: almost every day I have had something to put right—the fencing east and south of the house, the garage, the garden, if I may call it by that name. I want to make the little place a bower.

I have been with the T.G. [Trinidad *Guardian*] sixteen months now, but they haven't given me a raise. A thing that is making me bitter—I suppose that's how a Communist comes into being—is that a third-rate English boy who, I assure you, does not one whit more or better work than I do is getting a far bigger salary than I am getting. Here in the colonies the white man is supposed to be a superior species—eating better food, living in better houses. I don't mind telling you I have somehow come to detest most of them.

Have you heard from the BBC in connection with your short story? Let me know.

Everything and everybody O.K.

Yours affectionately,
PA

May 9

DEAR VIDO,

You know, silly as it may sound, I find myself doing three (and very nearly four) stories at the same time. I mean I am doing three stories, not waiting to finish one before beginning another.

I don't want to give you the impression that I am writing like blazes; but I am writing, slowly and piecemeal, so to speak; and this is better than not writing at all. I feel exceedingly good at your encouraging words, because I know you are not flattering me and I have confidence in your opinion; still, I shouldn't like you to bank too much on me, for if I don't come up you'll be disillusioned; and this would be painful for both of us. Look, it isn't that I lack confidence. I *know* I can write; but it is also true that I get tired more quickly. Suppose I had nothing to do for six months. I have no doubt I'd write out my first novel. And I have no doubt it would be good, even though I may not easily find a publisher.

Cultivate Swanzy [of "Caribbean Voices"]. Write on W.I. themes; not only fiction, but go in for factual writing also. These must be something better than ordinary descriptive journalism. They must have literary value. I have sent in a short—you know, that Mohun piece. If it's accepted I'll give you half the proceeds. They still have my "Obeah."

PA

May 26

DEAR EVERYBODY,

My big story has come out at last—in this week's *Isis*. And my name is in biggish capital letters. Probably the first and only big article I shall ever do for the paper. It is really impossible to get ahead in that paper.

I shall send along a copy of the story as soon as my tutor returns the magazine. We have become rather friendly, my tutor and I. It is a very good thing.

This past week has been a very busy one for me. Last Sunday, I gave my first big tea party. It cost me about twenty-five shillings. There were ten people in my tiny sitting room. And the room soon became very smoke-filled. The party was my first big do, and I was so nervous that I didn't eat a thing. I was so busy seeing about the other people and forgetting so many things. The gas ring was occupied; the water refused to boil; and the tea I gave out was as thin as weak soft drinks and the colour of light-brown paper. However, shortly after the badly disorganised tea, I passed round the beer—I had bought twelve bottles—and everybody was in quite good humour, after the fun they had all had over the rotten tea. It was a very successful party and was still going strong at a quarter to seven.

So I have settled down at last. From the mass of reading I have on, there is precious little time for writing. But I wonder if that isn't a good thing. Reading novels makes you think, and I have been doing a lot of thinking.

I do hope you are keeping up your writing. For heaven's sake, do. You are old enough. You have no time to wonder what you have to write about. Your experience is wide and if you write merely one page a day you will shortly find that you have a novel on your hands. About your short stories, I think it is high time we tried to find a publisher. About the typing: it costs thirty-six cents a thousand words. So if you have seventy thousand words—the length of the average book—it will cost you under thirty dollars. We can try to split the cost, or use the money from your BBC short story. You will have to write an explanatory note stating that most of these stories are set in the West Indies. Send me a copy. I shall do my best for them. I promise nothing. But there can be no harm in trying.

Keep well, don't worry, and keep on writing.

Give Ma and Meera and Savi and Satti [all younger sisters] and Shivan [his younger brother, aged six] my love.

With all my love,
VIDO

July 23

DEAR VIDO,

I am sending you today a money order for ten dollars. It will help you see a patch or two of France. It's such a fleabite, but I'd feel brutal if I didn't send anything at all.

We will be posting you a parcel with sugar, grapefruit, etc. There'll be some cigarettes inside the sugar. See that you get them. The parcel will arrive at about the middle of October, so you should be at Oxford to receive it.

My "Obeah" was broadcast on July 14th. I haven't received the cheque yet. But I have had bad luck with the Mohun story. They've sent it back! And I thought it was such a story!

Really, I'm in no mood to write another, and this "reject" has dampened me quite a bit.

Write us some long letters about your visit to France. I wish I had a hundred dollars to send you. And you mustn't keep such a long time from writing. One begins to suppose that something dreadful must be happening to you. Kamla has had some trouble with her eyes, but is otherwise all right.

Love from all of us,
PA

July 30

DEAR PA,

You ought not to have sent that two pounds for me. Please don't feel badly about not sending me money. The discipline, you know, of not having anyone but yourself to depend on is quite good, especially for a man like me. I discover in myself all types of aristocratic traits, without, you know too well, the means to keep them alive. Whenever I go into a new town, I go into the best hotel, just to feel comfortable, sit in the lounge, read all the newspapers—borrowed from clerks who are usually very obliging—and drink coffee. I like comfort. And, whereas in Trinidad I was tremendously shy of going even into a Civil Service office, now I go everywhere, firmly believing that I have as much right to be there as anybody else. That is the one good thing Oxford has done for me. It is an expensive university. People expect you to behave easily, and, believe me, you do. Actually, the process of my emergence really begins with getting on that plane at Piarco. For the first time in my life I was dead alone—and I enjoyed it.

YOU HAVE ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR A HUNDRED STORIES. FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE START WRITING THEM. YOU CAN WRITE AND YOU KNOW IT. STOP MAKING EXCUSES. ONCE YOU START WRITING, YOU WILL FIND IDEAS FLOODING UPON YOU. DON'T LOOK FOR DRAMATIC STORIES OR HUMOROUS STORIES. AS SOMEBODY ONCE SAID, EVEN A HAND IS DRAMATIC. EVERYTHING IS DRAMATIC. MATERIAL, YOU HAVE IT EVERYWHERE. LOOK BACK ON YOUR LIFE FROM CHILDHOOD UPWARD. REMEMBER A SINGLE MAN OR INCIDENT THAT IMPRESSED ITSELF UPON YOU. AND A STORY WILL GROW. ANOTHER POINT. WRITE A STORY AS STRAIGHT OFF AS POSSIBLE. IN ONE DAY OR TWO DAYS. YOU WILL BEGIN LAMELY BUT LATER YOU WILL CATCH YOUR SECOND WIND. I HATE LECTURING YOU THIS WAY BUT I WANT TO HEAR THAT YOU ARE WRITING. I WANT TO HEAR THAT YOU ARE WRITING VERY, VERY MUCH. YOU HAVE BEEN IDLE SUFFICIENTLY LONG. SIT DOWN TONIGHT AND WRITE THAT STORY ABOUT THE DROWNED CALF AND THE EXPERIENCED DIVER. THAT IS AN EXCELLENT STORY. YOU KNOW FURTHERMORE THE TYPE OF PEOPLE YOU ARE WRITING ABOUT. THINK, THINK, AND WRITE.

I can hardly speak to you about writing. I can only urge you. Write straight off, even without correcting your typescript. Put the rough stories away. Take them up about a fortnight later. And then revise them. Write one short story a week. You can afford to do this. Please write. The essential thing about writing is writing.

You are the best writer in the West Indies, but one can only judge writers by their work.

VIDO

Paris
September 13

MY DEAR KAMLA,

This is my last day in Paris. I have not been having a wonderful time, as all good postcard writers say. I have been having a quiet, agreeable stay.

Originally I had planned to leave on Monday the 17th, but I have had to change my plans. As usual: a woman. This time she was Finnish. We met in Montmartre, the painters' district, and we spent three delicious days together. She even put off going to Finland for a day. But she left yesterday and I can't bear to stay on any longer in Paris without her. She is marvellous, really. She has spent a year in America and, despite this, she is fascinating. She collects turtles and records of Arabian music! And when she said that she was going to call one of her turtles—we had bought two in a Paris shop—after me, what could I do?

I would give anything to be able to see her in Finland before term begins and to spend a month with her during the Xmas vacation. But money! Money!

I am not terribly healthy. I am very weak and constantly need to sit down. And I find it difficult to sleep.

What can I tell you of Paris? It is wonderfully full of monuments. But I sense an underlying unhappiness among the people. Paris is a jaded city, littered with monuments to dead and mocking glories. The glamour evaporates in a night and you realize that the grind is as hard as in England. The world has nothing new to offer. Only people can be exciting.

And, frankly, as Maugham says, beauty is a bit of a bore.

I am afraid I am a terrible brother, really. Sending you only very sketchy notes. Forgive me, will you?

I have only a few hours in which to get ready to go to the airport.

Love, from
VIDO

September 30

DEAR KAMLA,

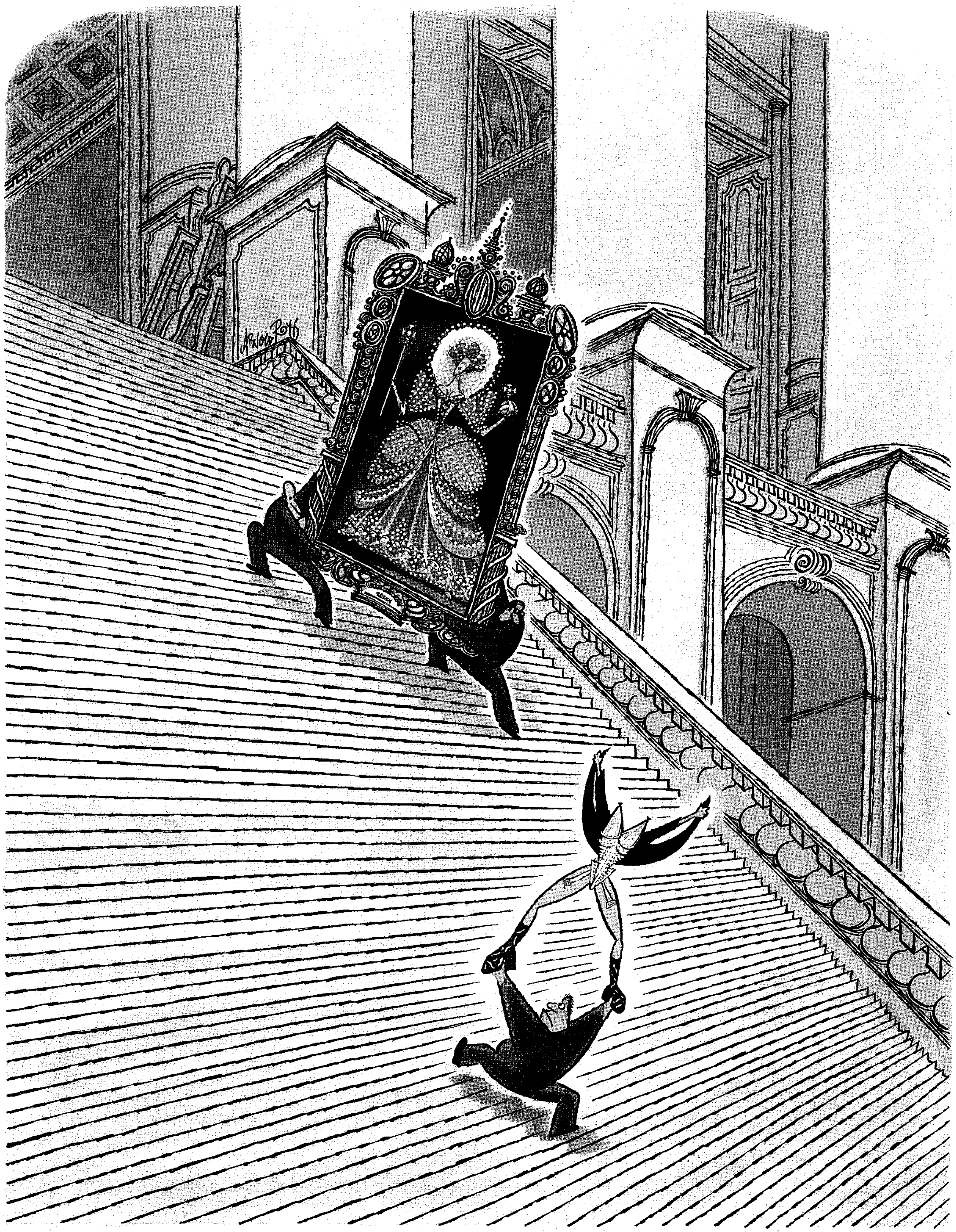
On the 20th of this month at about half past eleven in the morning, I wrote "The End" to my novel, about which I have been dropping hints for the last sixteen months. Well, *alors c'est fini*. And what a relief! The man at the Ashmolean Museum here has the novel now. He has already read two-thirds, which I sent him before going to Paris. He is very pleased with it; thinks it readable, funny, and "extremely well-written." Frankly, I am inclined to agree with him. Tomorrow I am having tea with him, and will hear his opinion of the novel as a whole. It appears that a good friend of his is a director of the publishing firm of Secker and Warburg—reputable people. And he has undertaken to do the "peddling" of my opus. Wish me luck. I shall be so happy if this novel brings me some money for Ma and Pa.

I am afraid I have become a writer. The more I write, the more I want to write. And I don't enjoy writing. You see, characters begin to live in your mind. One character has been keeping me awake for a couple of nights. Let her grow; I shan't throw her out of my head just yet. While she is with me, I am not worried. It is the same sentiment you know that prompts you to eat the yolk of an egg after the white, or to keep the best part of a meal for the last bite, or to keep your highest card for the last hand. Does this make sense? It should.

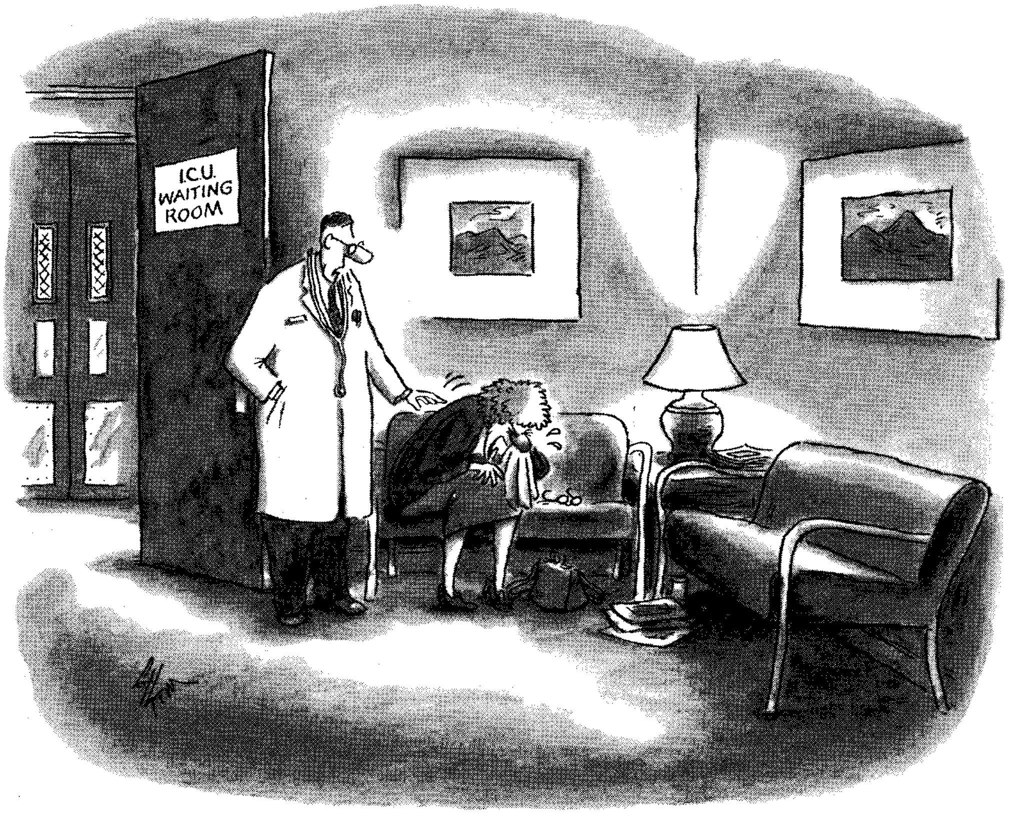
As I grow older, I find myself doing things that remind me of Pa more and more. The way I smoke; the way I sit; the way I stroke my unshaved chin; the way in which I sometimes sit bolt upright; the way in which I spend money romantically and foolishly. I am afraid Pa won't like this. For he will presently have no secrets from me. The more I learn about myself, the more I learn about him.

And now there is something you must do. I want you to expect nothing great from me. Never think that someday you will see my name in lights. I don't think you will. And I don't want you to be hurt or disappointed. I had a frightening dream last night. I promised myself, crying, to write a thousand words

SKETCHBOOK BY ARNOLD ROTH



Seasonal preparations at the Metropolitan Museum of Art this month include making room for Madonna's peach bustier and pin-striped jacket and George Clinton's platform boots in the Costume Institute's new exhibit, "Rock Style."



"His life was hanging by a thread, and then somebody fed him the bean burrito."

a day, for, "You see," I told myself, "you have only one more year of life. You have cancer. Write a thousand words a day. For every thousand words you write, you will get a thousand pounds."

November 15

Dear Everybody,

Pa has guessed the reason why my letters to home just stopped dead. [For two months, Naipaul did not write home.] The novel has been rejected. But I have got over my depression. The news about my novel just made me quite indifferent to everything. Today I feel mentally flabby, not having written anything since September 23rd, not having read anything besides college books since term began.

Love to all from
Vido

Aboard the Catalonian Express
Madrid-Barcelona
April 8, 1952

My Dear Kamla,

I am sitting in a first-class compartment in a Spanish train. The compartment is animated, although it is midnight. Spanish trains are not like English trains. Everyone speaks to everyone else the moment the train pulls out of the station and leaves people's separate and individual lives.

I am sorry to spring this foreign-stamped letter on you without any preparation, but I want you to know that whenever I am upset it is to you that I usually pour out the suffering of my tortured heart. When I don't write it means that I am all right. (Nasty play of words but don't hold it against me.)

We are five men and one woman in this de-luxe compartment. (The train is exclusively first class.) The woman sits on my right. She is extremely beautiful, and we have just had coffee in the dining car. Now she is telling the future of the gentleman opposite—a plump, oily man, middle-aged and with hair scattered sparsely around a shining, almost bald pate. The gentleman opposite me is without his coat. It is on paper supplied by him that I am writing this letter. Both pen and pencil have been lent to me by the man who sits on his right. A well-dressed, ordinary-looking man sits on my left.

The man opposite me tells funny stories. To my surprise, I still understand Spanish and am beginning to speak it better. And yet it is hardly more than eight days that I have been in Spain.

Now, does that sound English? No, no—the construction is definitely French/Spanish.

The day after winter returned to Britain, with a two-day blizzard that spread snow all over the country, I left England by the boat train for Paris. Two days in Barcelona. (Just stopped to pass my cigarettes round. Only one non-smoker in the compartment!) At B. met a Scottish girl (twenty-six, it turned out) who beguiled me into travelling by cargo steamer to Malaga. So, a two-day Mediterranean cruise travelling deck and being treated like a pig, while she, being a friend of the management and a flirt, travels like a queen.

Malaga, then, where I did my best to lose her, and did. Then train to Madrid. A beautiful city. We must visit Madrid when you come to England next year. I prefer Madrid to Paris.

Well, I must stop now. I want to take part in the life of the compartment. I am on my way to England and will get there in about forty hours, most of it in trains—third class! Fun ahead!

Love,
Vidia

Everybody calls me Vidia—disgusting name—and even I have got into the habit of calling myself that way.

April 21

Dear Pa,

The promptness and energy with which you have undertaken preparations for my return home this summer must, I fear, be wasted.

My financial situation is one that absolutely forbids returning home, and I am most unhappy to bring such a great disappointment to you.

The fact is I spent too much money in Spain. And, during the nervous breakdown (yes, it was that) I had, I grew rash and reckless and threw money about with a don't-care-a-damn in consequence. My only opportunity of recuperating from my present chaos is to remain in England this summer and live very cheaply. This is what I propose to do.

Further, this is my last big vacation before my exams, and I must work hard.

I shall be sending your story to Swanzy in a few days and I must say that you still remain a delightful writer.

When I am settled properly I shall write again.

Love,
Vido

June 2

Dear Everybody,

About three weeks ago, two of my friends and myself threw a bottle party in my room at college here. A bottle party is a cheap affair. You merely provide the emollient opening drinks. Everyone who is invited brings his own bottle. There were about forty people—men and women. The party started at seven. The Dean came at about eight-thirty and left at ten, the time when all women had to leave the college. But he saw me as he was leaving and gave me permission to keep the women on until ten-thirty. He had drunk so much or had such a fine time that he even forgot his pipe in my room. The party was a definite success.

The weather has been quite good this term. I have done some painting, and some work. In a cricket match last week I bowled 11-3-25-3 and made thirteen not out. In a minute or so, I shall be dressing for another match. I have been chosen for the first eleven. I hope I do well.

Peace of mind is the most valuable thing one can have in this world. Even if ambitions have to be abandoned, it is desirable. I cannot tell you what my three-month illness has brought me. I have to take things easily. It is like a jar of muddy water that must be left still so that the mud sinks to the bottom, leaving the water clean on top. When, at the beginning of April, I slowly pulled myself out, I had to pause and look at the debris around me. I have been clearing it away this term.

Of course I know the reason for my breakdown: loneliness, and lack of affection. You see, a man isn't a block of wood that is sent abroad and receives two notches as a sign of education. He is much more. He feels and he thinks. Some people, alas, feel more, and think more than others, and they suffer. It is no good thinking that the sensitive man is happier or greater. No one cares for your tragedy until you can sing about it, and you require peace of mind to do this.

It may probably break you to know that I am shaving every other day now. I have to, and I find it a frightful bore.

My love to all, and don't forget me,
Vido

July 16

My Dear Vido,

I have kept back a whole week or longer from writing you. The fact is I wrote a full letter almost as soon as I got yours (of June 23); but I didn't like it and never mailed it.... Until I got your letter, I was worried about you. News of your recovery was like a tonic, and I went to work refreshed.

I am very glad you went to Spain. It was the best thing for you.

This will pain you, but your Ma will be having a baby in September or October.... I know it's a mess, but there we are. About your troubles...I should know a good deal about it, for I was the victim of a neurosis myself many years ago. But I got over it, and have done more work after that than I had bargained for. So do not be afraid. In my own case, some religious literature helped, but only in a superficial way. It was a palliative, not the cure. You will get over all fear of the bogey, for that is what the whole neurosis amounts to. You see, my dear Vido, we are not just a mass of flesh and bone. We are also what our ideas have made us. There is no such thing as "sick" or "depleted" nerves. It is not a matter of tissue but of thought. What gets us sick is our wrong ideas.

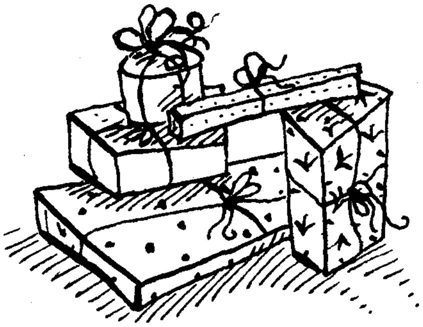
Write us a long, nice letter.

Till then I am as ever,
Pa

September 6

Dear Everybody,

This week I got two letters. And, as I promised, I am replying straight away. The long vacation is nearing its end. It is, as a matter of fact, a mere month before it is over, and my last year before the exams begin.



I shall satisfy in everything your curiosity. Patricia Ann Hale is a girl of twenty. She is a member of the university, not unintelligent, nor altogether unattractive. I met her in February and have been thankful ever since. She befriended me at the height of my illness, put up with all my moods—my coarseness and my fits of anguish. The relationship between us, while not a platonic one, is so far virtuous. The talk about being "netted" is rather cynical, and I do trust that you will not make things doubly difficult for us. Her father is making a terrible fuss about it, and I hope that the same narrowness will not be found in you.

About her character: she is good, and simple. Perhaps a bit too idealistic, and this I find on occasion rather irritating. She insists on looking at the good, and chooses to shut her eyes to the bad. She shares my literary tastes, and I have found my friendship with her most stimulating.

I would have written before, but I had no idea things would develop as they have. I have had girlfriends before who have rejected me. In none I found the qualities I found in Pat—her simplicity, her goodness, her charm. I should be grateful if Pa were to write her a sympathetic letter—or better, write me an understanding letter. Such a letter will, I think, cheer her up quite a lot. She has seen pictures of all of you, and is, naturally, quite attached to Shivan.

I have not, I hope, given the impression that we are going to be married soon. We have to wait to see how things work out.

Love,
Vidia

September 17, 1952

My Dear Vidia,

Your letter was most interesting, but very perturbing, too. On the one hand, I want to do or say nothing that will make you unhappy; on the other, I would hate myself for encouraging you into a situation which later may prove to be regrettable. (If only you had been older—say, twenty-three or twenty-five—I might have had more confidence in your decision.) The girl, I have no doubt, is everything you say of her, and we are deeply grateful to any whose understanding and solicitude helped you so much when you most stood in need. But, as you say, her father disapproves of the relationship between you.

I know in the end you will do only what pleases you, and I want you to know that whatever you do the only thing that matters to me—and to all of us at home—is your happiness. I am glad that you do not intend to marry soon.

Talk the matter over with her again and again, and see if she understands Trinidad's reactions to mixed marriages. Almost without variation, these marriages have never been successful—not because of the temperaments of the two people concerned but because of the attitude that is shown them by friends on both sides: you will not be accepted by her people; she will not be accepted by anyone except those in our own home here.

This is an extremely serious matter, and we all want you to give it your most earnest consideration. Why not complete your studies at the university before embarking on a course which you may later regret? If at the end of this time you are still sure you are suited to each other, I shall give you my most affectionate good wishes.

Your affectionate
Pa

September 28

Dear Pa,

I don't want to break your heart, but I hope I never come back to Trinidad, not to live, that is, though I certainly want to see you and everybody else as often as I can. But Trinidad, as you know, has nothing to offer me.

The very fact that I can write about future plans ought to hearten you. You see, I have really been suffering from an abnormal mental condition. I was depressive. I have seen the psychologist twice and there is now no further need to see him. The first talk was inconclusive. At the end of the second, he discovered what was wrong with me. Put simply, it was this: Disappointed in Oxford, and myself, I had looked upon myself as a failure, yet was never willing to admit this fear. Accordingly, this fear of failure became fear of something so absurd and horrifying that I shall not tell what it was for a number of years. When I discovered this, I suddenly felt that a weight had been lifted off me. And now, looking at myself, I see a young man, healthy mentally and physically, at a good university, with a year of preparation for his exams, and once more full of ambition. I no longer drag myself stupidly from meal to meal. This state of mind, the most normal thing in the world, now seems to me to be so extraordinarily wonderful.

Of course, I don't intend getting married for at least two years.

Love to Ma,
Vido

Benares
February 2, 1953

Dear Vido,

This might be a very sad letter for you.

Pa is very ill at home and has been confined to the hospital. I shall quote Satti's letter: "It was a heart attack and a pretty bad one at that since he cannot walk. He has to take his meals lying down. Dr. Mani told Ma that Pa would not be able to work steadily again, and, of course, if he knows that he might pan out right away." According to Ma, Pa's greatest worry is that he cannot get his stories published. Now something immediate regarding the publishing of his stories means life or death for him and consequently life or death for us, especially those poor little children at home. Now, will you in the name of Pa's life see immediately to his short stories and write him a nice, cheering letter? Ma says that "He (Pa) has written altogether about fourteen short stories which he would be very glad that Vido should see a publisher to get them published. That is very important towards Pa's health. Please do your best to tell Vido that he would feel well if arrangements are made."

These are Ma's words. I need not try to tell what Pa's being alive means to us—you know. So do take some time off and see about it. Write something encouraging to Pa immediately.

Write me saying what you have done. Carelessness about this means Pa's death.

Love,
Kamla

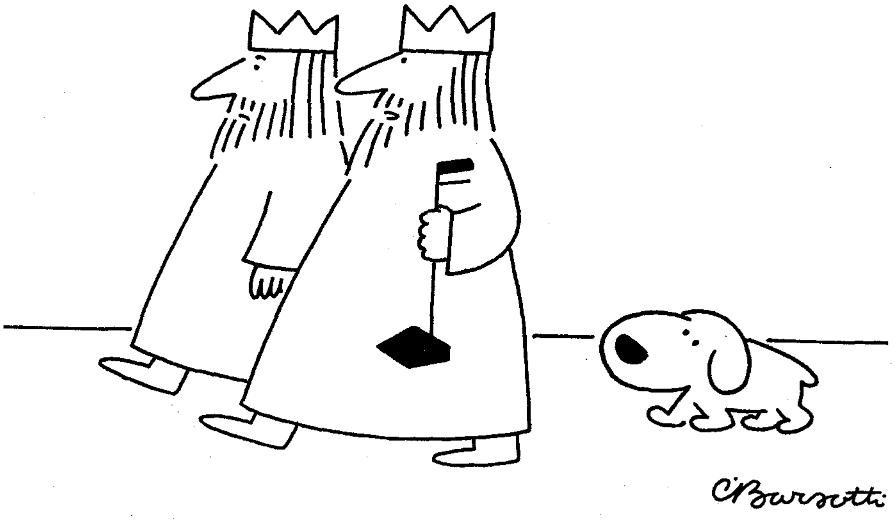
February 3

My Dear Pa,

First of all, I want to ask you not to worry. If you are unable to work, then you needn't worry, because I shall leave Oxford after my examinations in June.

You should not have thought that I was uninterested in your writing. You ought to know that I am perhaps more keen on your work than anyone else. If I try to hawk your book around, I wouldn't be doing you a favour. I would be trying to sell stuff that deserves to be published.

Allow me to tell you a story. The most successful and perhaps the best novelist today in the U.K. is a man called Joyce Cary. Cary began writing after he had served in the Balkan War, served in Nigeria and had retired. For years, his wife was the object of pitying derision. "What is your husband doing?" people asked her. "He is my man, and he knows what he is doing," she said. Cary published his first book



"It's good for my image."

in 1932 when he was in his mid-forties. It was a hopeless failure. And so was nearly every book he published—until 1944. Then the bad books became bestsellers. Critics began to recognise the patience and the art Cary had expended. Today Cary is an old man; he has tasted success only in the last six or seven years. He lectures in Oxford sometimes.

Please have courage and try to trust me.

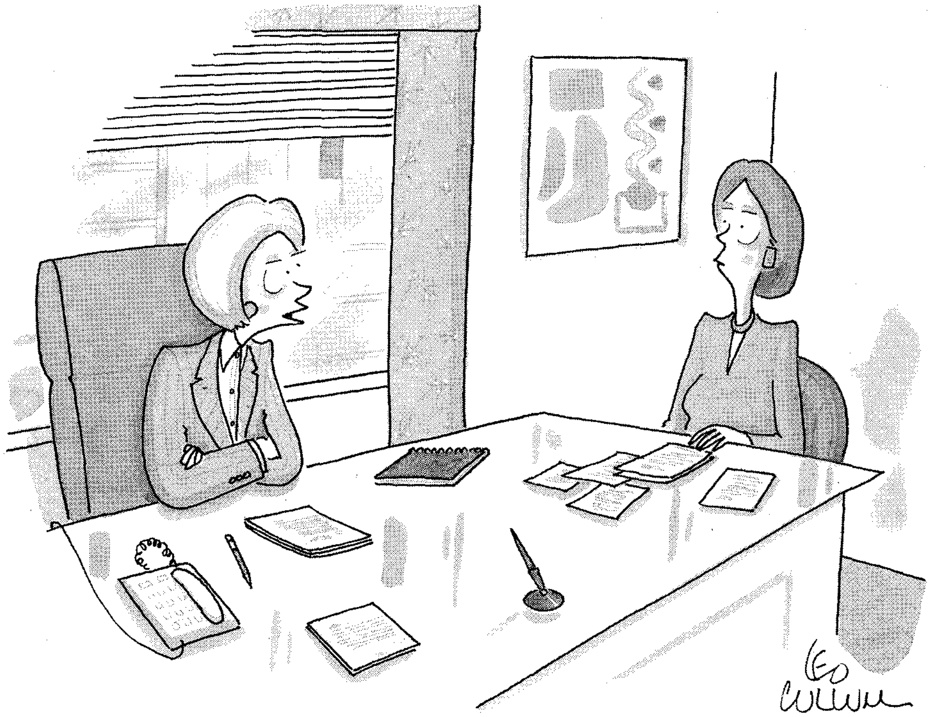
Love,
Vido

October 10

CABLE AND WIRELESS (WEST INDIES) LIMITED

NAIPAUL 26 NEPAUL STREET PORT OF SPAIN TRINIDAD

HE WAS THE BEST MAN I KNEW STOP EVERYTHING I OWE TO HIM BE BRAVE MY LOVES TRUST ME VIDO



"My only regret in life is that I never had a brainchild."

October 28

My Dearest Ma,

You are right to complain about my not writing; but, however much I wished, I just could not bring myself to do so. Something inside me just jibbed at the idea. Pat, without prompting, wrote a longish letter which I have not read.

I think it was rather kind of Henry Swanzy to pay a tribute over the radio; especially when he was at that time at the other end of the life-scale; he was about to become a father for the first time.

It hardly seems necessary for me to tell you how lonely and unprotected I feel. Everything I did—and did well, as I thought—always prompted the thought "Pa would like to hear of this." In a way, I had always looked upon my life as a continuation of his—a continuation which, I hoped, would also be a fulfillment. It still is, but I have to abandon the idea of growing older in Pa's company, and I have to get the strength to stand alone. I only wish I have half of Pa's bravery and fortitude.

The problems that face me are knowing what to do with Shivan, and whether Meera or Satti wishes to go to university somewhere. But it is silly looking for solutions just yet, and I hope to have made plans when I come home. I would hate being separated from Kamla while she is unmarried.

It appears that Pa had been dead for four days when I went to collect the shirts and the vase and the socks.

Please forgive me for the delay in writing, but don't worry.

My love to all,
Vido

May 3, 1954

My Dearest Ma,

It is wrong for you to think that I do not wish to come home, and that I intend to forget everyone there. Nothing is going to give me greater pleasure than the return home. I fully intend to return home this summer, but I can give no definite date. It may be next week, or next month, or three months from now. The fact is this: I don't see myself fitting into the Trinidad way of life. I think I shall die if I have to spend the rest of my life in Trinidad. The place is too small, the values are all wrong, and the people are petty. Besides, there is really very little for me to do there. It will be all very well to come home and spend six months. Nothing would give me sharper pleasure. But there remains the problem of getting a suitable job, even at the end of that six months. Do you see? It is much better for me to spend two more months in this country getting a job than returning home to eat lotuses. But whatever happens, you can rest assured that I shall return to Trinidad to see you this year.

Do not imagine that I am enjoying staying in this country. This country is hot with racial prejudices, and I certainly don't wish to stay here. My antipathy to a prolonged stay in this country is as great as my fear of Trinidad. I hope you understand my position now, and I think you will stop believing that you have seen the last of me.

Now that the time is drawing near for my day of departure from Oxford, I am discarding all my English friends and acquaintances. I shall spend the rest of my life trying to forget that I came to Oxford. But it may not take as long as that.

So you can expect me home, but I can't say when, and you must not worry about anything. The world is a pretty awful place, but our star will shine bright yet.

Love to all, from your silly son,
Vido

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NOVEL ACCEPTED LOVE VIDO ◆

A REPORTER AT LARGE

UNTRUE CONFESSIONS

Is most of what we know about the rebel slave Nat Turner wrong?

BY TONY HORWITZ

DECAY has its own aesthetic in the rural South, where poverty, rough-hewn building stock, and rampant flora make houses that have been vacant for a generation seem as anciently deserted as Welsh ruins. In Southampton County, Virginia, a low, marshy enclave just west of the Great Dismal Swamp, there are scores of such eerie wrecks. They teeter amid dead-level cotton fields, and are worn to an almost identical finish: warped gray timber, rust-colored roof, green vines entangling naked sills.

In several weatherboard shells, floors are stained with dark patches that locals believe is blood. At night, they say, ghosts tote lanterns through the crumbled rooms, making heavy rustling sounds, as if peanut sacks were being dragged across the attic floor. Beside one collapsed house, a weed-choked garden overlays a mass grave containing seven maimed bodies. These homesteads were among twenty attacked by Nat Turner in August of 1831, when he and some sixty other black rebels rampaged across the county for two days, killing every white person they found. Armed with farm tools and a few swords and muskets, they slaughtered fifty-seven people, mostly women and children, before militiamen quelled the revolt, just a few miles from the county seat.

Nat Turner's insurrection was one of very few slave revolts in American history, and was by far the bloodiest. It traumatized the young nation and hardened the resolve of both slaveholders and abolitionists in ways that contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War, three decades later. Yet the true story of what happened during those two hot days and nights in 1831 remains largely untold. In Southampton, the insurrection has been effaced from public memory. Nationally, historians have been slow to challenge a facile explanation of the revolt which casts Nat Turner as a lone, God-crazed madman. And when William Styron portrayed Nat Turner in fiction, in 1967, as a flawed idealist, tormented by lust, he was fiercely attacked by those who felt that a white author had no right to tell the story of a black hero. Protests eventually helped thwart plans to make Styron's novel into a film.

But Nat Turner's uprising has a way of lingering, like the farmhouses still rotting in the Southampton cotton fields. And controversy over the revolt keeps resurfacing, as it is doing now, after a twenty-five-year lull. Local mavericks in Southampton are calling for Nat Turner to be remembered, even honored. There has been renewed talk of a movie based on Styron's novel, directed by Spike Lee. And scholars are taking a fresh look at the historical record, and questioning whether the revolt has been misunderstood as the work of one deranged man rather than as a symptom of broader unrest.

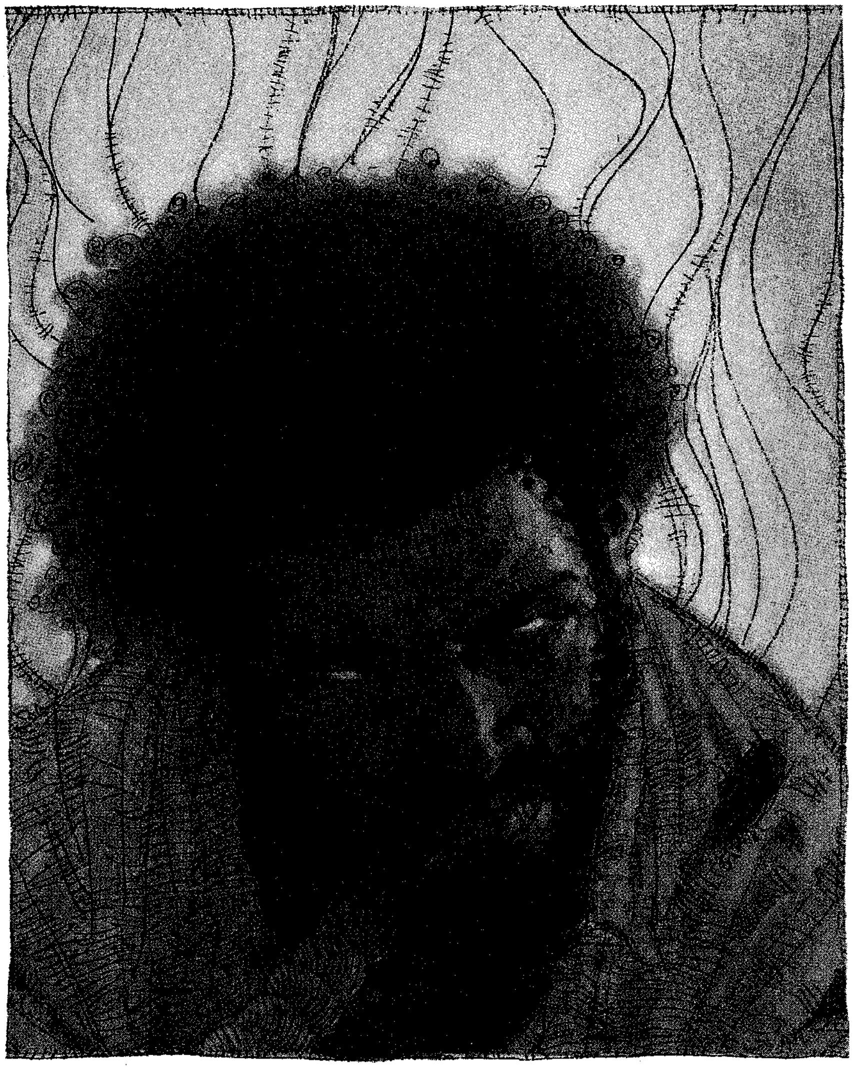
Interpretation of history always reveals as much about the present as it does about the past. But with Nat Turner the contemporary echo is especially loud, raising raw and unresolved questions about race, religious zealotry, and revolutionary violence. Even at a distance of more than a century and a half, the story of a black man who massacred whites in the name of God and freedom remains incendiary. "This war, the Nat Turner war, is still going on," James Magee, a black man in Southampton County who is trying to rehabilitate Turner's memory, says. "He set off a powder keg that's still exploding."

IN 1831, Southampton County was a backwater that bore little kinship to either the genteel Old South of Confederate lore or the grinding plantation economy that most Americans think of when they imagine the brutishness of slavery. Southampton's loamy soil had been exhausted by tobacco, and few farmers owned more than a handful of slaves. Many whites occupied low-slung, wood-frame dwellings known as "a story and a jump." Slaves lived and worked close by their owners, not only in the fields but in workshops and apple-brandy stills. The county also was home to an unusually large number of free blacks, a legacy of the many local Baptists, Methodists, and Quakers who opposed slavery.

Nat Turner was born here in 1800, the same year as John Brown, on a small farm owned by Benjamin Turner. He learned to read and write, and gained renown as a healer and preacher—even baptizing a white man. There is no hard evidence that Benjamin Turner or later owners treated Nat Turner with unusual barbarity, though in his twenties he did run away. He returned voluntarily, and it was soon afterward that he allegedly began plotting the revolt, which he launched, with six co-conspirators, following a feast of roasted pig and hard apple cider.

Around midnight on August 21st, the band headed for the homestead of Turner's master, Joseph Travis, a wheelwright, and axed him and his family in their beds. From there they embarked on a house-to-house death march that covered about twenty miles. Almost no one was spared; at a rural school, the insurgents killed ten children. Along the way, they picked up guns, horses, and sixty or more followers, including free blacks. The rebels were single-minded in their slaughter; there is no evidence of rape, house-burning, or concerted plunder.

Panicked families fled into the woods and swamps, and officials called out the militia. The rebels were quickly killed or captured, some wearing the clothes of their murdered masters. Enraged whites immediately exacted revenge, on both rebels and innocent slaves. One militiaman reported to a newspaper that he witnessed "the slaughter of many blacks, without trial, and under circumstances of great barbarity." One white witness wrote to his parents about the fate of a slave captured by the militia: "They burnt him with red hot irons—cut off his ears and nose—stabbed him, cut his hamstrings, stuck him like a hog, and at last cut off his head." At another site, a slave's severed head was stuck on a stake as a warning. The spot became known as Blackhead Signpost, and a road of that name still runs through the county. Estimates of the number of blacks killed during and just after the revolt run into the hundreds.



Nat Turner's insurrection traumatized the nation and hardened the resolve of both slaveholders and abolitionists in the years prior to the Civil War.

KADIR NELSON

Nat Turner was the only one of the rebel leaders to avoid capture. Officials offered a reward for his arrest, describing the thirty-year-old slave as a stocky, knock-kneed man of average height. After two months, a local farmer finally found the fugitive hiding in a foxhole just a mile from the Travis homestead. The terse transcript of Turner's trial, six days later, which survives on yellowed paper at the Southampton courthouse, bears dispassionate witness to the routine degradation of slavery. It introduces the rebel leader as "Nat alias Nat Turner a negro man slave late the property of Putnam Moore an infant." (Slave surnames, like slave marriages, were not legally recognized by whites, and Turner's owner at the time of the revolt was technically Joseph Travis's young stepson.) Turner's sentence of death, like that of other slaves who were hanged, bore a price tag: "And the Court value the said slave to the sum of three hundred and seventy five dollars." Owners of human chattel were entitled to recompense when this property was "destroyed" by the state, as contemporary documents often put it.

Virginia blacks, both slave and free, lost some of their few liberties in the aftermath of the revolt. The state legislature quickly banned preaching by blacks, unsupervised religious instruction, and assembly. Patrols for runaway slaves were stepped up across the South, and some locales banned the importation of Virginia slaves because they might be "infected." Many free blacks from Southampton accepted transportation to Liberia rather than endure the new restrictions and suspicions.

But the insurrection also stirred the antislavery movement and shattered the prevailing notion that slaves were docile, or incapable of fighting for their freedom. Two weeks after the revolt, the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison described the violence as "the first step of the earthquake, which is ultimately to shake down the fabric of oppression." In later decades, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln would invoke Turner's legacy, and John Brown may have taken Turner as his model when he launched his own doomed plot to arm and free blacks at Harpers Ferry, in 1859.

The few other nineteenth-century plots by blacks to rise up against whites—most notably by Denmark Vesey, in Charleston, and Gabriel Prosser, in Richmond—were quickly betrayed, and their leaders expeditiously hanged. In the century after the Civil War, it became a truism among scholars that the institution of Southern slavery made rebellions nearly impossible. Most historians believed that this was due to the harsh controls and the dispersal of slaves in rural areas. Slavery apologists credited the benign paternalism of the masters. In this context, Nat Turner's revolt came to represent an anomalous explosion sparked by one man's fanaticism.

To support this thesis, historians could point to an extraordinary document that seemed reveal all one needed to know about the revolt. Just after Turner's capture, a white lawyer named Thomas Gray visited him in his jail cell and recorded what he claimed was Turner's confession that he had single-handedly plotted and led the uprising. The pamphlet Gray published three weeks later, entitled "The Confessions of Nat Turner," purported to tell the story in Turner's words, though the formal language appears to have been largely the lawyer's own. Gray also interjected his own analysis and observations, including a remark that contradicted racial stereotypes of the day: "For natural intelligence and quickness of apprehension, [Turner] is surpassed by few men I have ever seen."

However, the essential image that

emerged from the confession was of a man driven to mass murder by religious derangement. Turner told Gray of childhood visions and of marks on his body, which were taken as signs that he was a prophet. As he grew older, he made a display of asceticism, preferring fasting and prayer to the company of others. "I was ordained for some great purpose in the hands of the Almighty," he told Gray. Visitations from "the Spirit" and portentous signs—drops of blood on corn, hieroglyphics found on leaves, visions of white and black spirits duelling in the skies—gradually revealed to Turner his God-given mission. "The time was fast approaching when the first should be the last and last should be first," he said. "I should arise and prepare myself, and slay my enemies with their own weapons."

Turner's narrative of the two-day massacre was icy and unrepentant. Joseph Travis "was to me a kind master," Turner told Gray; then he described how he and his followers killed not only the wheelwright but "a little infant sleeping in a cradle." At another home, Turner reported, "I saw Will pulling Mrs. Whitehead out of the house, and at the step he nearly severed her head from her body, with his broad axe." Turner then chased Mrs. Whitehead's daughter Margaret. "After repeated blows with a sword," Turner said, "I killed her with a blow on the head, with a fence rail." Another woman was forced to look upon the mangled body of her husband, then was ordered to lie beside him and was shot. As Turner recited these horrors, Gray wrote, he had a "fiend-like" composure. "I looked on him and my blood curdled in my veins."

This image of Turner as a homicidal madman, motivated by religious hallucinations rather than by the hardships of slavery, was amplified by the first detailed history of the revolt, published in 1900 by a Southampton historian named William Drewry. Drewry interviewed survivors who recalled the revolt, but he also infused his account with the proslavery, white-supremacist views popular in his day. Slavery, he wrote, "was an institution which nourished the strongest affection and piety in slave and owner." Turner had been well treated, Drewry reported, so his rebellion was unjustified, and also counterproductive, because it provoked harsh reprisals and undermined abolitionist sentiment in Virginia.

Blacks evidently felt differently, and Turner became a folk hero in their stories and songs—a legendary trickster and liberator known as "ole Nat" or "Prophet Nat." In the nineteen-thirties, when researchers from the Works Progress Administration interviewed ex-slaves, the old people made frequent reference to this wily, though by then historically murky, figure. "White folks was sharp," an elderly woman said, "but not sharp enough to get by ole Nat. Nat? I don't know who he was. Ole folks used to say it all de time. De meanin' I git is dat de niggers could always outsmart de white folks."

OLD MILWAUKEE MAN'S WONDERS

Not anymore that lake with its cataract,
A crescent moon, afloat on it;
Not anymore the brush, free of its fidget,
So an image flowers, lightly, under it.

Not that anymore, or new metal objects,
Or any intergalactic whatnot;
Or confusion of loves, you catch your breath,
But ride on over it. Not anymore,
Even, grief at the death of friends.

It is, he says, a pebble standing out in the grit.
A shadow it throws on the road. It is an ant,
In the shadow, *in* it. This dear dog now
Likes to hear the cars go past, leaps up
And lies on the stone wall, listening.

                                        No regrets
When they pass out of earshot,
And I am looking at this ant, how it shifts,
At this pebble, no part of me,
Going no place.

—Christopher Middleton

William Styron was born in 1925 in Newport News, Virginia, just an hour's drive from Southampton. As a boy, he learned almost nothing of Nat Turner until he took a car trip to Southampton with his high-school football team. By the road, he noticed a lone historical marker telling of the revolt. "It was like a thunderbolt," Styron told me, upsetting everything he'd been told by his slave-owning grandmother about docile slaves and good masters, and all he'd experienced as a child in the tightly controlled apartheid of the Jim Crow South.

Styron met with me at the Connecticut farmhouse where he has lived since 1955, amid rolling New England hills that feel very far from the steamy flatness of southeastern Virginia. Now seventy-four, and with only slight traces of a Tidewater accent, Styron said that he began taking notes on Nat Turner during the forties and started writing in the early sixties, against the backdrop of civil-rights ferment.

Styron believes that historical fiction works best when the writer is fed "short rations" by the historical record, rather than gorged with facts that fetter his imagination. In his view, Turner's confession to Thomas Gray and William Drewry's 1900 history were the only authentic sources on the revolt, so he relied mostly on his own insights to flesh out Turner's character. In particular, Styron was struck by Turner's seeming reluctance to kill. According to the confession, Turner's first hatchet blow to Travis glanced off his master's skull, and he later struck and failed to kill a woman, claiming that his sword was dull. In the end, he murdered only Margaret

Whitehead. Styron therefore made Nat's unrequited desire for the young woman a central plot element, and her murder the climax of the book. Turner, who narrates the novel, emerges as a tortured figure: desperate for freedom but disdainful of fellow-slaves, lustful but monklike, masturbating frequently as he dreams of white women yet, apart from a homosexual encounter with another slave, sexually inexperienced. Styron also muted the apocalyptic tone of Turner's confession. "I quite consciously changed him from what the evidence seemed to have been—namely, that he was a psychopathic mass murderer—to a man who had human dimensions," Styron said.

The psychologically complex image Styron created of antebellum society reflected the influence of Stanley Elkins's controversial 1959 book, "Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life," which drew parallels between plantation life and the Holocaust. In both circumstances, Elkins argued, the victims were so brutalized and infantilized that they submitted docilely to their oppressors. Elkins's work was attacked by blacks who felt that he perpetuated the stereotype that slaves were childlike Sambos, and it fell out of favor as other historians began to document acts of resistance among both slaves and Jews.

Nonetheless, Styron felt that "The Confessions of Nat Turner," published in the summer of 1967, would be seen as a searing indictment of slavery and a courageous attempt by a white Southerner to enter black consciousness. Many whites and some blacks did read it that way. The book received critical raves, quickly became a No. 1 best-seller, and won the Pulitzer Prize. But it also became a flash point for racial antagonism, coinciding, as it did, with one of the most explosive moments in the history of race relations in America. Just weeks before the book was published, rioting had erupted in twenty-three cities. In Detroit alone, forty-three people were killed, prompting the governor of Michigan to declare a state of "insurrection." In April, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, and black neighborhoods exploded again. National Guardsmen patrolled city streets, Black Panthers battled police, and militants such as H. Rap Brown called for guerrilla warfare against the white establishment.

Perhaps unwisely, Styron publicly drew parallels between the black rage of the sixties and that of Nat Turner in 1831. He appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*, which quoted provocative passages from the novel and noted that both Turner and H. Rap Brown were "coolly hell-bent after Whitey." One difference between the two types, Styron told the Washington *Post*, was that Turner "had no articulated social consciousness. He was a religious fanatic."

A group of black intellectuals quickly published "William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond." The book accused Styron of injecting "Whitey-Serum" into the historical record; of putting his own "unreconstructed southern racist" thoughts inside the head of a slave; of depicting blacks as "bootlicking Sambos"; and, worst of all, in the words of Lerone Bennett, Jr., the editor of *Ebony*, of "de-balling" blacks by turning a "virile, commanding, courageous figure" into "a neurasthenic, Hamlet-like white intellectual in blackface."

Another contributor, John Henrik Clarke, wondered if whites "failed to see Nat Turner as a hero and revolutionary out of fear that they might have to see H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael in the same way." Others detected a coded, counter-revolutionary message in Styron's portrayal of Turner: black revolutionaries, then and now, were doomed. The opposite was true, one contributor, John Oliver Killens, warned. "Nothing short of total liberation will quench their thirst for freedom," he wrote. "There are thousands of Nat Turners in the city streets today."

When, in early 1968, Twentieth Century Fox announced plans to film Styron's novel, starring James Earl Jones as Nat Turner, opponents formed the Black Anti-Defamation Association and recruited LeRoi Jones, Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown to condemn the project. They declared in one statement that "hunkies such as William Styron do not have the right or authority from black people to speak for us or interpret our heros." After threats of a boycott by black actors, the producers pledged to "project a positive image of Nat Turner as a black revolutionary" and to give the film a name other than that of Styron's novel.

But the filmmakers ran into trouble again when they began scouting locations in Southampton County. Local whites resented Styron's unflattering depiction of their forebears as "brandy-fragrant sun-scorched snaggle-mouthed anus-scratching farmers." There were also fears that the film might inflame the tense racial atmosphere in Southampton, which was then in the midst of turbulent integration. In 1970, Fox finally cancelled the project, citing cost overruns.

Styron received eight hundred thousand dollars for the movie rights, but he was left embittered by the controversy. A close friend of James Baldwin, who lived

Bernie Schoenbaum

"We're in H.M.O.s—the closest to legit we've been in years."

for a time in a cottage on his Connecticut property, Styron regarded himself as a liberal on race. But the heckling and the hate mail made him retreat from public debate about his novel. "At the time in which it was written, there was a terrific need on the part of the black intellectual community to have a kind of spotless black hero, almost a caricature of Spartacus," he told me. "Being a novelist, I wouldn't supply that kind of hero. I wanted to give a picture of a man who was tormented by what he was doing, who had doubts about his mission even as he was going to do it."

In retrospect, Styron said he could have consulted historical material that he was unaware of while writing the book, such as evidence that Turner had a wife. (Critics felt that Styron perpetuated an image of black family pathology by making Turner a sexually tormented bachelor.) However, Styron said, none of that would have placated his critics, who, he believes, rejected the entire exercise of a white man's writing from a slave's perspective. In this sense, Styron feels that he "unwittingly created one of the first politically incorrect texts." Those who attacked him "were denying our common humanity by saying I had no right to enter into the skin of a black man," he said.

Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, who was among those writers, feels that Styron still misconstrues both Turner and the black viewpoint. Thelwell is a professor of African-American studies at the University of Massachusetts; he believes that Turner's slaughter of women and children was justified by an institution that bartered human flesh, split up families, and was responsible for the torture and murder of many slaves. "Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind," he said. He continues to regard Styron's book as an "ignorant monstrosity" of a novel which amounts to "an appropriation of other people's culture in the most disrespectful way."

Vincent Harding, a theologian and another of the ten black writers, believes that Styron, by substituting Freudian agony for Turner's millennial wrath, stripped the revolt of its true context: the apocalyptic Christianity that suffused antebellum America and molded men like Turner and John Brown. "The God they knew promised that injustice would cost the perpetrators in very real and very concrete ways," Harding told me. "The twentieth century doesn't deal with that kind of God anymore. It's easy to caricature and trivialize it."

In Southampton County, the roadside historical marker that first stirred William Styron's imagination was toppled by a car in the nineteen-seventies. When it was finally put back up fifteen years later, it was moved from its original site, in the county seat, and now stands beside a cotton field on a two-lane road far from any town. One other roadside marker, identifying the site of a nineteenth-century homestead, makes passing reference to the insurrection but gives the event an Old South spin. It reads, in part, "In the servile insurrection of August, 1831, the houses were fortified by faithful slaves and made a place of refuge for fugitive whites." This sign was erected in 1930, at the peak of moonlight-and-magnolia nostalgia for antebellum culture.

The Southampton County Historical Society, which operates two museums, owns the sword Nat Turner carried during the revolt. Neither museum makes mention of Nat Turner in its exhibits, however, and the sword is locked away, out of public view. This year, Southampton is marking its two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary with monthly lectures and exhibits on county history. The exhaustive program includes talks on obscure local figures, such as President John Tyler's grandson, but omits Nat Turner. "It's a celebration of the accomplishment of being here two hundred and fifty years, not of everything that happened," Collin Pulley, the chairman of the anniversary committee, says. Pulley, a leading official with the Sons of Confederate Veterans, manages a furniture store that is adorned with portraits of Southern generals.

Five years ago, two members of the historical society produced a documentary on Nat Turner. The society sells the video, offering it as a defense against charges that it has willfully ignored the most significant event in local history. (The society also paid to reërect the road sign about the revolt.) But the documentary, while generally neutral in tone, is based on William Drewry's 1900 account, which depicted the rebellion as an unjustified uprising against a benevolent system—an opinion that is still shared by many local whites. "Nat had his insurrection because he was so well treated that his expectations rose higher than what he could achieve," Gilbert Francis, one of the documentary's producers, told me when I met with him, in 1995, during my first visit to the county. Francis, who died two years ago, was a prominent lawyer and large landholder. For decades, he was also the gatekeeper of Nat Turner's memory in Southampton. Though a self-described liberal—he was one of the few whites in the county who welcomed deseg-

NATIONAL BRING YOUR BROTHER-IN-LAW TO WORK DAY

"Is this it? Are we going to spend the rest of our lives flailing around in the growing gap between rich and poor?"

regation—he opposed public recognition of Nat Turner. He was descended from a family that was massacred in the rebellion, and he showed me a family Bible listing the birth, in 1831, of a son to one of the survivors, beside the words, "1 mo 7 days after Insurrection."

"The bastard tried to kill my entire family," Francis said. "I'm not going to glorify him." He also despised William Styron, because the novelist depicted his great-grandfather, Nathaniel Francis, as a drunken and sadistic slave master, "a gross, hairless man with a swinish squint" who was married to "a slab-faced brute of a person with a huge goiter." In the nineteen-sixties, when Fox tried to film Styron's novel, Francis had been the principal liaison between Hollywood and the local community, and had demanded changes in the script.

Since Francis's death, questions about Nat Turner have been referred to the documentary's co-producer, Katherine Futrell, a retired librarian. She walked with me to the site of the tree from which Nat Turner was hanged, and showed me the potter's field nearby where the executed rebels are believed to be buried. On occasion, she takes school groups to visit the surviving homes attacked by the rebels in 1831. (Only one is inhabited.) But Futrell, like Gilbert Francis, believes it is best to leave the revolt a matter of private interest rather than public display. "As my father used to say, 'Let sleeping dogs lie,'" she said. As a child, Futrell, who grew up in the rural district where the revolt broke out, sensed that older whites had felt nervous long after the event. Whenever tension arose between the races, she told me, "whites would go to homes that could be easily fortified and defended." The majority of the county's population is black, as it was in 1831, and a vestigial fear persists—not of actual violence but of inflamed racial tension. "We have a good relationship with black people and want to keep it that way," Mildred Drake, a local bank teller, told me. "Let's not stir things up."

Blacks in Southampton have generally acceded to this hush, and most respond to queries about Nat Turner with a shrug of indifference, or a vague gesture in the direction of the roadside marker. Even those who trace their ancestry to Turner have long been reluctant to talk about him. "People were always afraid to say they were related to him," says Asphy Turner, eighty, who was told as a child that he was directly descended from Nat, and whose land encompasses Turner's final hideout. "The question is, was he a great man or a bad man? He fought for freedom, but he murdered women and children. I reckon people would rather not talk about it."

James Magee, however, is determined to revive the memory of Nat Turner. Magee stands a lanky six feet six and bears a strong resemblance to the actor Morgan Freeman. A retired state employee, Magee is a talented painter who devotes many of his canvases to the insurrection. On sunny days, he often sets up an easel along the path the rebels travelled, painting scenes such as "On the Road to Jerusalem," his current work, which shows Turner and his accomplices leaving a house in which they've just slaughtered a white family.

"Those hateful Confederate S.O.B.s at the historical society still want to play the master-slave game, but I ain't the 'old marsey' type," Magee, who is sixty-five, says. "You can make history out of yesterday's ironing, but the only history here that matters is Nat Turner. I'm making damned sure that not everyone forgets that." Magee has conducted his own periodic tours of the route of the rebellion, usually for black groups, beginning at a church where Turner is believed to have preached to fellow-slaves the week before the uprising. "I tell blacks, 'This is hallowed ground, this is where the emancipation of your people began,'" he said. "It's a direct path from Nat Turner to John Brown to the Civil War. He struck the first blow toward ending slavery."

Magee also draws on oral history, much of it from stories he heard as a child sitting on the porches of sharecroppers' shacks. "I listen to things unwritten, words whispered around the hearth," he said. "How do you expect there to be a written record from blacks when slaves could be whipped or worse for having a paper or a book?" Among the tales he heard was that captured rebels were put in barrels with nails driven through the staves, and rolled down the road. During the county's bicentennial celebration, in 1949, Magee says he saw grisly relics of the revolt on display: a wallet and book bound with a rebel's tanned flesh, a broadaxe, a club, and

Margaret Whitehead's bloodstained dress.

Magee hopes to one day erect a proper memorial or a museum devoted to Nat Turner and his followers. There is not much local interest in this, but Magee has one unlikely ally, a seventy-eight-year-old white man named Stanley Holcomb, who lives in a crumbling antebellum mansion with a mezuzah on the door. Holcomb, an entrepreneur and a onetime movie extra, is a convert to Judaism who has a Colonel Sanders-style coiffure and wears a white Stetson and cowboy boots. A sharecropper's son who grew up on a peanut farm in Southampton, Holcomb says he realized the "dishonesty of the hush-hush attitude toward Nat Turner" when he moved away from Virginia as a young man. "I think it was guilt about slavery," he told me.

Three years ago, Holcomb produced his own movie on the uprising, a low-budget splatterfest that used locals as actors, including himself as one of Turner's masters and a young rapper with dreadlocks as one of the rebels. When I asked him why he had made the film, Holcomb replied, "Greed. That and annoying the old farts in Southampton who didn't want me to make it." But the black audience Holcomb hoped to find hasn't materialized, either, and he has sold only a few thousand videotapes.

Holcomb's next scheme is a Nat Turner museum, restaurant, and gift shop on the main highway through the county. Already, he has gathered two five-gallon buckets of dirt from a farm where Turner may have worked and plans to bottle and sell it as Soil Nat Turner Walked On. Holcomb has also collected slave artifacts, such as leg shackles and wrist irons. Like his film, though, the museum is an unpopular project among many whites, and Holcomb is still trying to raise the money for it. For now, the only commemoration of Nat Turner is a small, private gesture made most years by James Magee. On August 21st, he places a wreath by the roadside marker that tells of the revolt.

As Nat Turner surfaces once again in Southampton County, he is also being rediscovered by black intellectuals, some of whom are questioning the anti-Styron orthodoxy of the late sixties. Styron says he first sensed a thaw two years ago on Martha's Vineyard, where he has a summer home, when he attended a colloquy on race. Cornell West, a prominent black intellectual, told the audience that Styron had struggled to understand the common history of whites and blacks. "You could have knocked me over with a feather," Styron recalled. "I was tickled to death."

Styron also began a dialogue with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the head of the Afro-American Studies Department at Harvard, who felt that Styron's novel was overdue for a reëvaluation. "Censorship is to art as lynching is to justice, and it's just as disgusting when blacks do it as whites," Gates told me. The assault on Styron came at "the height of Black Power, of the super-macho, super-stud Black Panthers, with their guns, leather, and berets," he said. "Styron's version of Nat Turner was simply unreadable to these people, and they didn't want a white to write about it, particularly in that way."

Since then, Gates said, the blossoming of black-studies programs and the rapid expansion of the black middle class have made intellectuals more secure, and open to diverse points of view. "Back then, there was a tiny representation of blacks in academia and the media—the whole thing was a blanket of whiteness—and all black people could do was raise hell and throw stones," he remarked. "Now we have much more input and control of the images of black people."

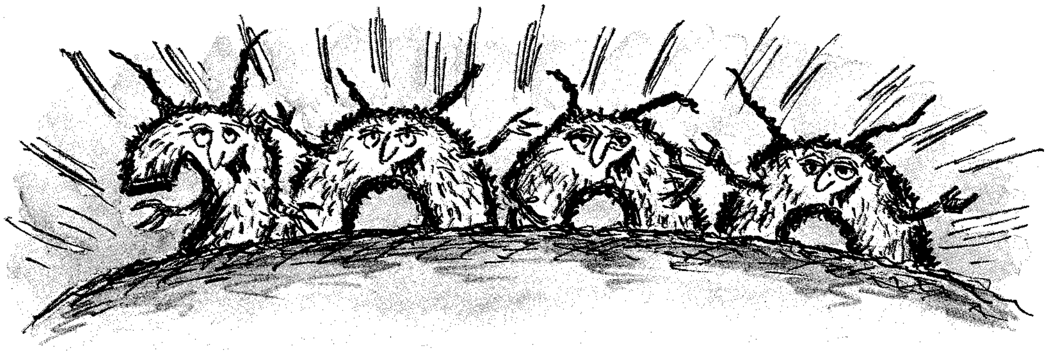
Last year, Gates arranged for Spike Lee to meet Styron on Martha's Vineyard. At Styron's home, they talked about the novel and how it might be adapted for film. Styron says that Lee was attracted to and challenged by the book's most controversial element, Turner's lust for Margaret Whitehead. "He was saying, 'This is volatile stuff,'" Styron told me. "'The black man and the white woman, the violence and the sex.'"

Spike Lee offered few details when he met with me, in New York. He told me that the Nat Turner project was "in limbo" because the person who had been championing it had left Fox. He also sensed that Hollywood was reluctant to finance a movie about a slave revolt. (Two recent films about slavery, "Amistad" and "Beloved," were box-office disappointments.) But Lee said that he still hoped a movie about Nat Turner, whom he regards as a great African-American freedom fighter, would eventually be made. "I don't think that one should just junk the novel," he said.

When I suggested to Lee that the savagery of Turner's story might be difficult to film, he bristled. "How does Spielberg handle violence in 'Saving Private Ryan'? That's the same way you have to handle it," he said. "People were fighting for what they believed in. Slavery was an evil institution. Why was the United States fighting World War II?" He acknowledged, though, that "there might be some things people still might not be able to stomach today," and that a movie on the revolt would be unlikely to have mass appeal. "We're not going to have Nat Turner Happy Meals at McDonald's. It's not going to happen."

In a 1967 interview in the *Times Book Review*, William Styron glibly declared, "What there is to know about Nat Turner can be learned in a single day's reading," thereby adding American historians to the list of people who were offended by his work. A flurry of books and articles disputed the claim. The historian Henry Irving Tragle, for instance, published hundreds of pages of neglected documents on the revolt, including trial transcripts, news reports, letters—even the certificate of execution for Turner, which his owner's estate needed in order to claim reimbursement from the state. But most scholars seemed more intent on rebutting Styron than on reëxamining the traditional understanding of the revolt. "The Styron controversy made the subject of Nat Turner seem scorching hot," said Kenneth Greenberg, the chairman of the history department at Suffolk University, in Boston, and the author of several works on Turner and slavery. "Academics, who tend to be a frightened group, didn't want to throw themselves on the flames." Also, in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, research on slavery began to focus on subtler and less documented forms of black rebellion, such as disobedience and sabotage. "Black culture itself—its music, language, and folk traditions—came to be seen as a form of resistance," Greenberg said.

As a result, Nat Turner entered a period of scholarly neglect. And the conventional wisdom about the revolt—which Styron underscored by using Turner's confession as the basis for his novel—remained virtually unchallenged. "Nat



OH Y2K, YES Y2K, HOW COME IT HAS TO END THIS WAY?

Now every day, to our dismay,
We're told of yet more disarray
That Y2K may put in play.
A double zero on display
In some computers could convey—
Since they are lacking thought, per se—
A false impression they'd obey,
Concluding in a faulty way
Which century it is that day,
And thus unleash, without delay,
The cyberbug called Y2K.
Then life won't be a cabaret.

Oh Y2K, yes Y2K,
How come it has to end this way?

If circuits sizzle and sauté
The cables into macramé,
Those passengers then in Taipei
With reservations for Bombay
Could find themselves in Saint-Tropez
Or on the road to Mandalay.
And ferryboats to Monterey
Would dock on time, but in Calais.
Caudillos off on holiday
Could all end up with Pinochet.

And in a brief communiqué
The Pentagon might have to say
It cannot fight the smallest fray
Because it's lost the dossier
Of soldiers to be told that they
Must leave the service, come what may—
The list that lists each Green Beret
Who privately has said he's gay.

Oh Y2K, yes Y2K,
How come it has to end this way?

The lobbyists who work on K
See all their loopholes go astray
And benefit the E.P.A.
And, thinking this is like Pompeii—
A doomsday in the U.S.A.—
Militiamen in full array
Go underground, and say they'll slay
Whoever tries, through naïveté,
To take the food they've stored away
Or criticize the N.R.A.

The A.T.M.s begin to spray.
Fresh twenties fall like new-mown hay.
The traffic lights all go to gray.
A celebrator slurs "Olé!"
As cars begin to ricochet
Like balls caroming in croquet
And, slyly slowing his sashay,
He just escapes a Chevrolet.

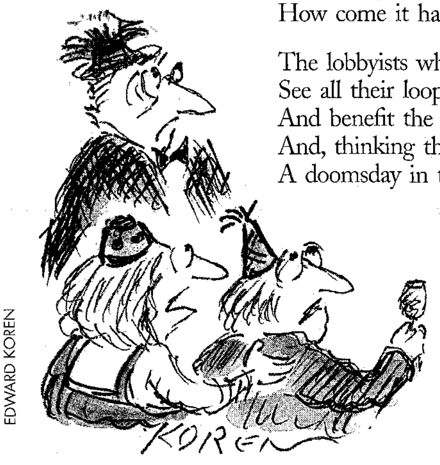
There's darkness on the Great White Way.
Nearby, a fussy, smug gourmet
Who's had some quail and duck pâté
And finished with marron glacé,
Sips cheap Hungarian rosé
That in the dark the sommelier
Mistook for rare Courvoisier,
And says—in French, of course—"*Parfait!*"

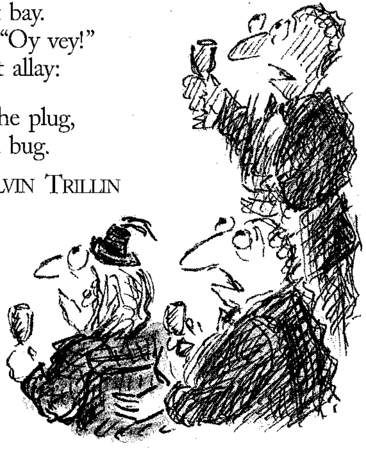
Oh Y2K, yes Y2K,
How come it has to end this way?

But maybe it will be O.K.—
As peaceful come this *janvier*
As water lilies by Monet,
As lyrics sung by Mel Tormé
Or herds of grazing Charolais.
For just such peacefulness we pray.
We say, "Oh *s'il vous plaît*, Yahweh."
But, still, we're scared of Y2K.
There's no one who remains blasé.
No awesome monster's held such sway
Since King Kong grabbed the fair Fay Wray.
We try to keep our fears at bay.
But one fear makes us say, "Oy vey!"
And here's the fear we can't allay:

God's thinking of pulling the plug,
And not with a bang but a bug.

—Calvin Trillin





EDWARD KOREN

Handelsman

"Don't knock over the frozen embryos."

• •

Turner has remained trapped in the narrative of 'great man' history," Scot French told me, citing Thomas Carlyle's famous maxim that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men." French is the assistant director of the University of Virginia's Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies, and part of the burgeoning new field of "social memory," which draws on anthropology, literary theory, and other disciplines to analyze how and why the historical record is crafted. He has spent five years researching both Nat Turner's revolt and the way it has been remembered, and hopes to publish his work next year.

When French began to delve into the source material, he found evidence to support many alternative readings of the revolt—including the possibility that blacks other than Nat Turner were crucial to the uprising, and that it was part of a broader conspiracy. In particular, French and other revisionists have analyzed the role played by Thomas Gray, the white amanuensis who took down Turner's confession. Gray, who was born into a prominent planter family, was in financial straits in 1831; he had recently sold most of his land and almost all his slaves, and had just been excluded from his father's will. He may therefore have had a strong economic incentive to publish the confession, which he appears to have embellished for dramatic effect. The confession, for instance, isn't mentioned in the transcript of Turner's trial, though Gray wrote that it was read in court and corroborated there by Turner. Gray's description of the trial includes vivid language not found in the transcript, such as the judge's pronouncement that Turner be hanged until he was "dead! dead! dead."

Also revealing is a long letter from a "gentleman" in Southampton that was published a month before Turner's capture. (Such anonymous dispatches were a common form of antebellum journalism.) It strongly resembles the confession, both in its writing style and in its analysis of the revolt. This suggests that Gray may have already settled on a version of events, which he then used Turner to substantiate. "Public curiosity has been on the stretch to understand the origin and progress of this dreadful conspiracy," Gray wrote in a preface to the confession, clearly regarding it as his mission to quiet rumor and panic over slave unrest. The confession he recorded duly reassured Southern whites that the violence didn't reflect the cruelties of slavery, or mass disaffection among blacks. Rather, it was "entirely local" and sprang from one man's "gloomy fanaticism," and from his charismatic sway over impressionable slaves.

What gives Gray's account enduring power is that all Americans can find within it a message they want to hear. "Everybody has a stake in the confession," French said. For abolitionists, Nat Turner's tale became a bracing account of slaves' desire for freedom. Similarly, for blacks, who have had few other slave rebels to lionize, "the confession has become an iconic text," French noted. "Nat Turner is the great man of black history." Scholars, too, have been mesmerized by the document, because, French explains, it allows them to say, "Here you have it from the man himself! A slave, no less! We never hear from them." As a result, historians have tended to downplay evidence that casts doubt on the confession's accuracy. In this respect, French compares the traditional interpretation of Turner's revolt with the "lone gunman" approach to political violence, which ignores the broader context of the act. "As soon as you call it the Nat Turner insurrection, you rule out everything else," French told me.

At the time of the uprising, the South was rife with antislavery agitation. In 1829, a free black named David Walker published a fiery "Appeal," which, calling on blacks to violently overthrow their masters, caused keen anxiety in the South. William Lloyd Garrison had just begun publishing his abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*, which was thought to be so incendiary that Georgia posted a five-thousand-dollar reward for Garrison's capture. Antislavery sentiment was also cresting in Great Britain, which abolished slavery in its empire, including in its West Indian colonies, in 1833. There was even debate in the Virginia legislature about freeing slaves. All this made

Southern slave owners feel isolated and defensive; one sign of their growing anxiety was the strengthening, a few months before the revolt, of laws against educating slaves.

Historians have also neglected eyewitness accounts from both whites and blacks, which appear to contradict the confession. Many reports prior to Turner's capture suggested that other blacks may have led the uprising. Letters and press accounts noted the prominent role played by both "Genl. Nelson" and a free black named Billy Artis. But Nelson was quickly executed, and Artis shot himself before he was captured. Only Turner remained at large as panicked whites struggled to make sense of the uprising. "He was the one person who could take the fall," French said. "If he'd been killed during the revolt, we could have been reading 'Nelson's Confessions.' "

Another puzzle is the testimony of a slave girl named Beck, who, before Turner's capture, told a court that she had heard slaves outside Southampton discussing an uprising a full year before it happened—contrary to Turner's later claim that he had disclosed his plans to only a few confidants, and just before the revolt. The court sentenced a number of slaves to death on Beck's testimony, though some whites repudiated her account once Turner's story was told.

Mary Kemp Davis, a professor at Florida A. & M., has recently published a book on Nat Turner that identifies other oddities. In the trials of rebel slaves that were held before Turner's capture, neither black nor white witnesses noted Turner's religious fervor. And though slaves such as Beck testified in these earlier trials, none were called in Turner's case. Rather, the court relied on a white witness, who stated that Turner "seemed to command the party," and on a court official who had interrogated Turner. "Could it be that the slaves could not be depended upon to give the kind of testimony the court desired?" Davis writes.

It is also possible that Turner protected other blacks by taking the blame for the revolt. Or, under prompting from Gray, and perhaps even coercion (he was "covered with chains" during the confession), he chose to tell the lawyer what he wanted to hear—and what Turner himself possibly wanted to believe. "He'd been alone in the woods for two months, and he may have become as crazy as a loon, willing to play along with this version," French said. "The confession might be true to Nat Turner's way of seeing, but not to the events as a whole."

Just after the uprising, a rash of suspected slave conspiracies were uncovered across Virginia and in nearby states, resulting in executions, militia call-ups, and panic as far away as Delaware. All this suggested to many whites a broad scheme, perhaps even an abolitionist plot stretching along the Eastern seaboard. The governor of Virginia, John Floyd, wrote that the conspiracy was "greater than will ever appear" and that "every black preacher" east of the Blue Ridge was privy to the plan. Virginia's swift crackdown on black churches and black education is also hard to square with the notion that the massacre was caused by a lone fanatic, now deceased.

French doesn't go so far as to posit a broad conspiracy, but he does argue that it is significant that so many people believed one existed. Prominent scholars familiar with French's work feel that it will re-ignite debate not only about the insurrection but about slavery itself. "This will bring Nat Turner back," Nell Painter, a historian and the director of African-American studies at Princeton, says. "And it opens up a whole range of possibilities—that there was widespread organized resistance to slavery, which runs against the myth of a solid South." Painter also believes that French and others will draw more attention to traditionally neglected sources, such as the journal of a plantation mistress who wrote of slavery in 1858, "We are living under a volcano." This is evidence, Painter says, "that the fear was real and so was the anger and violence." A new book, co-authored by the historians John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweniger and entitled "Runaway Slaves," documents the fact that thousands of slaves ran away each year, thus demolishing any lingering notion that slaves were docile and undefiant.

Scholars of slavery are also giving new weight to the oral histories and slave narratives that have traditionally been regarded as tainted by the abolitionist views of those who recorded them. "Historians have come to realize that if you don't use this material, the history of slavery comes only from the owners," Painter told me. Moreover, some of the more disputed oral traditions, such as the one regarding Thomas Jefferson's slave offspring, have recently been given support by DNA testing.

Like almost everyone else who is drawn to the Nat Turner saga, Scot French suspects that the full story of what happened in 1831 will remain impossible to reconstruct. "But I think we have to confront and embrace the uncertainty rather than imposing a false order on it," he said. "The Rashomon version may be the best narrative we have. About all we know for sure is that fifty-seven whites died. We have the bodies."

One body, though, remains unaccounted for—that of Nat Turner. According to several reports, the slave's corpse was given to doctors for dissection and his body parts were distributed among white families. "There are many citizens still living who have seen Nat's skull," William Drewry wrote in 1900. "It was very peculiarly shaped, resembling the head of a sheep, and at least three-quarters of an inch thick. Mr. R. S. Barham's father owned a money purse made of his hide." Other rumors claimed that Turner's body oil was used to make a cure-all called Nat's Grease.

French succeeded in tracing Turner's skull to Wooster College, in Ohio, where it was sent in 1866 with a letter of authentication from Southampton County. The museum in which the skull was kept burned down in 1901. According to a local news report, the skull was saved from the flames by being hurled from the burning building to the ground, "where it bounced and rolled like a foot ball." It has since vanished.

To French, the ghoulish diaspora of Nat Turner's remains is an apt metaphor for the lingering mystery of his life and of the slave rebellion. "We'll never lay this story to rest," he predicted. "Every generation will have to build its own cenotaph to Turner." When I asked him what such a crypt might look like, French said, "An empty tomb inscribed with poetry, history, and—inevitably—a lot of graffiti." ♦

FICTION

PET FLY

BY WALTER MOSLEY

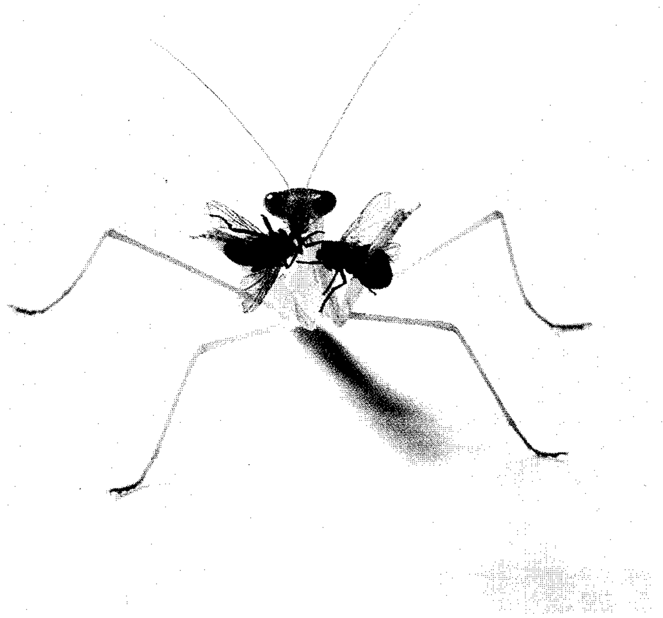
I HAD been seeing Mona Donelli around the building since my first day working in interoffice mail. Mona laughing, Mona complaining about her stiff new shoes or the air-conditioning or her boyfriend refusing to take her where she wanted to go. She's very pretty. Mona wears short skirts and giggles a lot. She's not serious at all. When silly Mona comes in she says hello and asks how you are, but before you get a chance to answer she's busy talking about what she saw on TV last night or something funny that happened on the ferry from Staten Island that morning.

I would see Mona almost every day on my delivery route—at the coffee-break room on the fifth floor or in a hallway, never at a desk. So when I made a rare delivery to the third-floor mortgage department and saw her sitting there, wearing a conservative sweater buttoned all the way up to her throat, I was surprised. She was so subdued, not sad but peaceful, looking at the wall in front of her and holding a yellow pencil with the eraser against her chin.

"Air-conditioning too high again?" I asked, just so she'd know that I paid attention to the nonsense she babbled about.

She looked at me and I got a chill, because it didn't feel like the same person I saw flitting around the office. She gave me a silent and friendly smile, even though her eyes seemed to be wondering what my question meant.

I put down the big brown envelope addressed to her department and left without saying anything else.



CATHERINE CHALMERS, "PRAYING MANTIS EATING TWO FLIES," 1995/RARE GALLERY

Back in the basement, I asked my boss, Ernie, what was wrong with Mona.

"Nothing," he said. "I think she busted up with some guy or something. No, no, I'm a liar. She went out with her boyfriend's best friend without telling him. Now she doesn't get why the boyfriend's mad. That's what she said. Bitch. What she think?"

Ernie didn't suffer fools, as my mother would say. He was an older black man who had moved to New York from Georgia thirty-three years ago. He had come to work at Carter's Home Insurance three days after he arrived. "I would have been here on day one," he told me, "but my bus got in on Friday afternoon."

I'd only been there for three weeks. After I graduated from Hunter College, I didn't know what to do. I had a B.A. in poli sci, but I didn't really have any skills. Couldn't type or work a computer. I wrote all my papers in longhand and used a typing service. I didn't know what I wanted to do but I had to pay the rent. When I applied for a professional-trainee position that Carter's Home had advertised at Hunter, the personnel officer told me that there was nothing available but maybe if I took the mail-room position something might open up.

"They hired two white P.T.s the day after you came," Ernie told me at the end of the first week. I decided to ignore that. Maybe those people had applied before me, or maybe they had skills with computers or something.

I didn't mind my job. Big Linda Washington and Little Linda Brown worked with me. The Lindas had earphones and listened to music while they wheeled around their canvas mail carts. Big Linda liked rap and Little Linda liked R. & B. Neither one talked to me much.

My only friend at work was Ernie. He was the interoffice mail-room director. He and I would sit in the basement and talk for hours sometimes. Ernie was proud of his years at Carter's Home. He liked the job and the company, but he had no patience for most of the bosses.

"Workin' for white people is always the same thing," Ernie would say.

"But Mr. Drew's black," I said the first time I heard his perennial complaint. Drew was the supervisor for all postal and interoffice communication. He was a small man with hard eyes and breath that smelled of vitamins.

"Used to be," Ernie said. "Used to be. But ever since he got promoted he forgot all about that. Used to be he'd come down here and we'd talk like you'n me doin'. But now he just stands at the door and grins and nods. Now he's so scared I'm gonna pull him down that he won't even sit for a minute."

"I don't get it," I once said to Ernie. "How can you like the job and the company if you don't like the people you work for?"

"It's a talent," he replied.

"WHY'ONT you tuck in your shirt?" Big Linda Washington said, sneering at me on the afternoon after I had seen Mona Donelli at her third-floor desk. "You look like some kinda fool, hangin' out all over the place."

Big Linda was taller than I, broader, too, and I'm pretty big. Her hair was straightened and frosted in gold. She wore dresses in primary colors, as a rule. Her skin was berry black. Her face, unless it was contorted from appraising me, was pretty.

We were in the service elevator, going up to the fifth floor. I tucked the white shirttails into my black jeans.

"At least you could make it even so the buttons go straight down," she remarked. "Just 'cause you light-skinned you can't go 'round lookin' like a mess."

I would have had to open up my pants to do it right, and I didn't want Big Linda to get any more upset than she already was.

She grunted and sucked a tooth.

The elevator opened, and she rolled out her cart. We had parallel routes, but I went in the opposite direction, deciding to take mail from the bottom of the stack rather than let her humiliate me.

The first person I ran into was Mona. Now she was wearing a one-piece deep-red dress held up by spaghetti straps. Her breasts were free under the thin fabric, and her legs were bare. Mona was short, with thick black hair and green eyes. Her skin had a hint of olive but not so deep as what you think of as a Sicilian complexion.

"I can see why you were wearing that sweater at your desk," I said.

"What?" she replied, in a very unfriendly tone.

"That white sweater you were wearing," I said.

"What's wrong with you? I don't even own a white sweater."

She turned abruptly and clicked away on her red high heels. I wondered what had happened. I kept thinking that it was because of my twisted-up shirt. Maybe that's what made people treat me badly, maybe it was my appearance.

I continued along my route, pulling files from the bottom and placing them in the right "in" boxes.

"If the boxes ain't side by side, just drop it anywhere and pick up whatever you want to," Ernie had told me on my first day. "That's what I do. Mr. Averill put down the rules thirteen years ago, just before they kicked him upstairs."

Bernard Averill was the vice-president in charge of all nonprofessional employees. He administered the cafeteria workers, the maintenance staff, secretarial services, and both the interoffice and postal mail departments. He was Ernie's hero because he was the only v.p. who had worked his way up from an entry-level position.

When I'd finished the route, I went through the exit door at the far end of the hall to get a drink of water. I planned to wait there long enough for Big Linda to have gone back down. While I was at the water fountain, a fly buzzed by my head. It caught my attention because not many flies made it into the air-conditioned buildings around Wall Street, even in summer.

The fly landed on my hand, then flew to the cold aluminum bowl of the water fountain. He didn't have enough time to drink before zooming up to the ceiling. From there he lit on the doorknob, then landed on the baby finger of my left hand. After that he buzzed down to the floor. He took no more than a second to enjoy each perch.

"You sure jumpy, Mr. Fly," I said, as I might have when I was a child. "But you might be a Miss Fly, huh?"

The idea that the neurotic fly could be a female brought Mona to mind. I hustled my cart toward the elevator, passing Big Linda on the way. She was standing in the hall, talking to another young black woman.

"I got to wait for a special delivery from, um, investigations," Big Linda explained.

"I got to go see a friend on three," I replied.

"Oh." Big Linda seemed relieved.

I realized that she was afraid I'd tell Ernie that she was idling with her friends. Somehow that stung more than her sneers.

SHE was still wearing the beaded sweater, but instead of the eraser she had a tiny whiteout brush in her hand, half an inch from a sheet of paper on her violet blotter.

"I bet that blotter used to be blue, huh?"

"What?" She frowned at me.

"That blotter—it looks violet, purple, but that's because it used to be blue but the sun shined on it, from the window."

She turned her upper torso to look out the window. I could see the soft contours of her small breasts against the white fabric.

"Oh," she said, turning back to me. "I guess."

"Yeah," I said. "I *notice* things like that. My mother says that's why I never finish anything. She says I get distracted all the time and don't keep my eye on the job."

"Do you have more mail for me?"

"No, uh-uh, I was just thinking."

She looked at the drying whiteout brush and then jammed it back into the small bottle that was in her other hand.

"I was thinking about when I saw you this morning," I continued. "About when I saw you and asked about the air-conditioning and your sweater and you looked at me like I was crazy."

"Yes," she said, "why did you ask that?"

"Because I thought you were Mona Donelli," I said triumphantly.

"Oh." She sounded disappointed. "Most people figure out that I'm not Mona because my nameplate says Lana Donelli."

"Oh," I said, suddenly crushed. I could notice a blotter turning violet but I couldn't read a nameplate.

Lana was amused.

"Don't look so sad," she said. "I mean, even when they see the name some people still call me Mona."

"They do?"

"Yeah. It's a problem having an identical twin. They see the name and think that Mona's a nickname or something. Isn't that dumb?"

"I didn't know you had a sister, but I saw Mona on the fifth floor in a red

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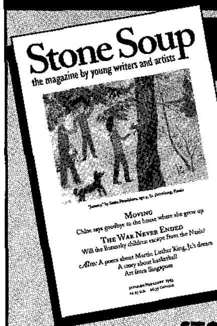
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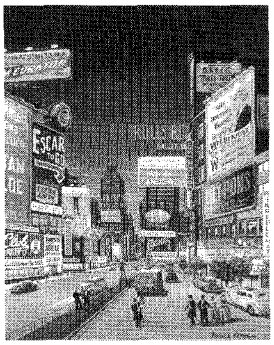

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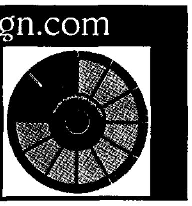

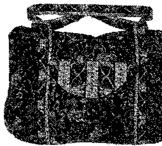

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dress, and then I saw a fly that couldn't sit still, and then I knew that you had to be somebody else," I said.

"You're funny," Lana said, crinkling up her nose, as if she were trying to identify a scent. "What's your name?"

"Rufus Coombs."

"Hi, Rufus," she said.

"Hey," I said.

My apartment is on 168th Street, in Washington Heights. It's pretty much a Spanish-speaking neighborhood. I don't know many people there, but the rent is all I can afford. My apartment—living room with a kitchen cove, a small bedroom, and a toilet with a shower—is on the eighth floor and looks out over the Hudson. The four fifty-eight a month includes heat and gas, but I pay my own electric. I took it because of the view. There was a cheaper unit on the second floor, but it had windows that look out on a brick wall and I was afraid I'd be burglarized.

"Do you own a TV or a stereo?" my mother asked when I was trying to decide which apartment to take.

"You know I don't."

"Then you ain't got nuthin' to burgle," she said. I had called her in California, where she lives with my uncle.

"But they don't know that," I said. "I might have a color TV with VCR and a bad sound system."

"Lord," my mother prayed.

I didn't own much; she was right about that. Single mattress on the floor, an old oak chair that I found on the street, and kitchen shelving that I bought from a liquidator, for bookshelves, propped up in the corner. I also have a rice pot, a frying pan, and a kettle, with cutlery and enough plates for two.

I have Rachel, an ex-girlfriend living in the East Village, who will call me back at work if I don't call her too often. My two other friends are Eric Chen and Willy Jones. They both live in Brooklyn and still go to school.

That evening, I climbed the seven flights up to my apartment. The elevator had stopped working a month ago. I sat in my chair and looked at the water. It was peaceful and relaxing. A fly was buzzing against the glass, trying to get out.

I got up to kill him. But up close I hesitated. His coloring was unusual, a metallic green. The dull-red eyes seemed too large for the body, as though he were an intelligent mutant fly from some far-flung future on late-night television.

He buzzed against the pane, trying to get away from me. When I returned to my chair, he settled. The red sun was hovering above the cliffs of New Jersey. The green fly watched. I thought of the fly I'd seen at work. That bug had been black and fairly small by fly standards. Then I thought about Mona and then Lana. The smallest nudge of an erection stirred. I thought of calling Rachel, but I didn't have the heart to walk the three blocks to a phone booth. So I watched the sunset gleaming around the fly, who was now just a black spot on the window. I fell asleep in the chair.

At 3 A.M. I woke up and made macaroni and cheese from a mix. The fly came into the cooking cove, where I stood eating my meal. He lit on the big spoon I'd used to stir the dinner and joined me for supper.

Ernie told me that mortgaging didn't get much interoffice mail.

"Most of their correspondence comes by regular mail," he explained.

"Aren't they on the newsletter list?"

"She a white girl?"

"So?"

"Nuthin'. But I want you to tell me what it's like if you get it."

I didn't answer him.

I began delivering invitations to office parties, sales-force newsletters, and Productivity Tips penned by Mr. Averill to Lana Donelli. We made small talk for thirty seconds or so, then she'd pick up the phone to make a call. I always looked back as I rounded the corner to make sure she really had a call to make. She always did.

The following Monday, I bought a glass paperweight with the image of a smiling Buddha's face etched in the bottom. When I got to Lana's desk, she wasn't there. I waited around for a while but she didn't appear, so I wrote her a note that said "From Rufus to Lana" and put the leaded-glass weight on it.

I went away excited and half scared. What if she didn't see my note? What if she did and thought it was stupid? I was so nervous that I didn't go back to her desk that day.

"I really shouldn't have left it," I said that night to the green fly. He was perched peacefully on the rim of a small saucer. I had filled the inner depression with a honey-and-water solution. I was eating a triple cheeseburger with bacon and fries from Wendy's. My pet fly seemed happy with his honey water and only buzzed my sandwich a few times before settling down to drink.

"Maybe she doesn't like me," I said. "Maybe it's just that she was nice to me because she feels sorry for me. But how will I know if I don't try and see if she likes me?"

"HI," I said to Lana the next morning. She was wearing a jean jacket over a white T-shirt. She smiled and nodded. I handed her Mr. Averill's Productivity Tips newsletter.

"Did you see the paperweight?"

"Oh, yeah," she said without looking me in the eye. "Thanks." Then she picked up the phone and began pressing buttons. "Hi, Tristan? Lana. I wanted to know if . . ." She put her hand over the receiver and looked at me. "Can I do something else for you?"

"Oh," I said. "No. No," and I wheeled away in a kind of euphoria.

It's only now, when I look back on that moment, that I can see the averted eyes, the quick call, and the rude dismissal for what they were. All I heard then was "Thanks." I even remember a smile. Maybe she did smile for a brief moment, maybe not.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, I left three presents for her. I left them when she was away from her desk. I got her a small box of four Godiva chocolates, a silk rose, and a jar of fancy rose-petal jelly. I didn't leave any more notes. I was sure that she'd know who it was.

On Thursday evening, I went to a nursery on the East Side, just south of Harlem proper. There I bought a bonsai, a crab-apple tree, for three hundred and forty-seven dollars and fifty-two cents. I figured I'd leave it during Lana's Friday lunch break and then she'd be so happy that on Monday she'd have to have lunch with me, no matter what.

I suspected that something was wrong when my pet fly went missing. He didn't even show up when I started eating a beef-burrito supreme from Taco Bell. I checked the big spider's web near the bathroom window, but there were no little bundles that I could see.

That evening I was on edge, thinking I saw flies flitting into every corner.

"WHAT'S that?" Ernie asked me the next morning when I came in with the tiny crab-apple tree.

"It's a tree."

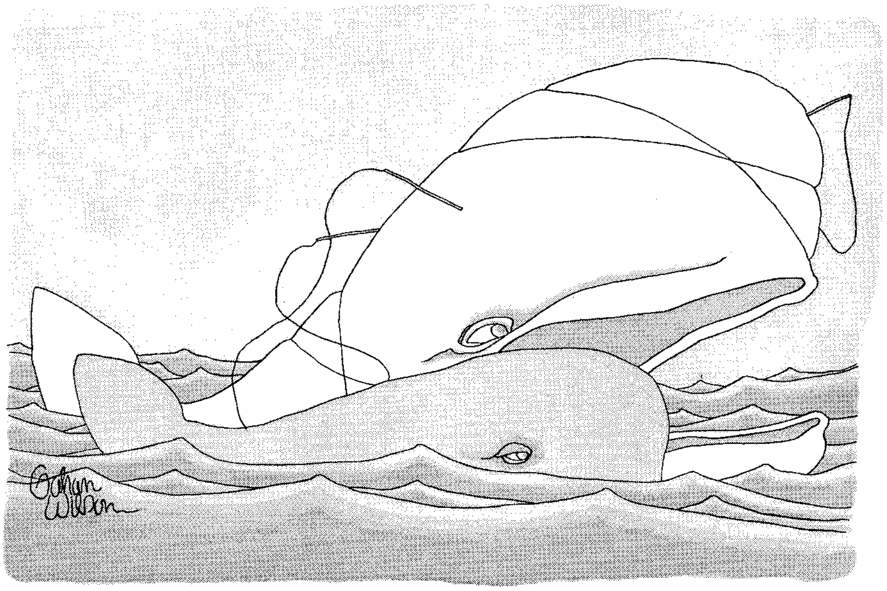
"Tree for what?"

"My friend Willy wanted me to pick it up for him. He wants it for his new apartment, and the only place he could get it is up near me. I'm gonna meet him at lunch and give it to him."

"Uh-huh," Ernie said.

"You got my cart loaded?" I asked him.

Just then the Lindas came out of the



"Now that I've wiped him out, I kind of miss the little peg-legged bastard."

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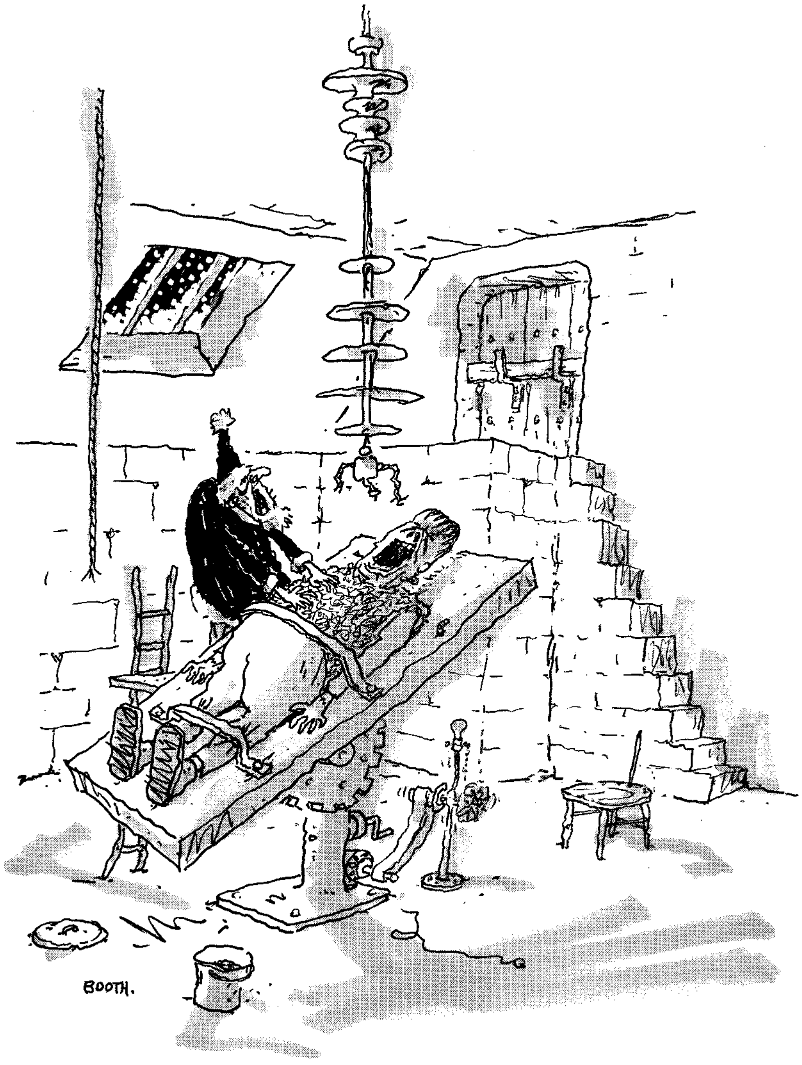


"It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas."

• •

service elevator. Big Linda looked at me and shook her head, managing to express contempt and pity at the same time.

"There's your carts," Ernie said to them.

They attached their earphones and rolled back to the service elevator. Little Linda was looking me in the eye as the slatted doors closed. She was still looking at me as the lift rose.

"What about me?"

"That's all I got right now. Why don't you sit here with me?"

"O.K." I sat down, expecting Ernie to bring up one of his regular topics, either something about Georgia, white bosses, or the horse races, which he followed but never wagered on. But instead of saying anything he just started reading the *Post*.

After a few minutes I was going to say something, but the big swinging door opened. Our boss, Mr. Drew, leaned in. He smiled and nodded at Ernie and then pointed at me.

"Rufus Coombs?"

"Yeah?"

"Come with me."

I followed the dapper little man through the messy service hall to the passenger elevator, which the couriers rarely took. It was a two-man elevator, so Drew and I had to stand very close to each other. He wore too much cologne, but otherwise he was perfect for his supervisory job, wearing a light-gray suit with a shirt that hinted at yellow. I knew that he must have been in his forties, but he could have passed for a graduate student. He was light-skinned, like me, with what my mother called good hair. There were freckles around his eyes. I could see all of that because Mr. Drew avoided my gaze. He wouldn't engage me in any way.

We got out on the second floor and

went to his office, which was at the far end of the mail-sorting room.

I looked around the room as Drew was entering his office. I saw Mona looking at me from the crevice of a doorway. I knew it was Mona because she was wearing a skimpy dress that could have been worn on a hot date. I only got a glimpse of her before she ducked away.

"Come on in, Coombs," Drew said.

The office was tiny. Drew actually had to stand on the tips of his toes and hug the wall to get behind his desk. There was a stool in front of the desk, not a chair.

By the time he said, "Sit down," I had lost my nervousness. I gauged the power of Mr. Leonard Drew by the size of his office.

"You're in trouble, Rufus," he said, looking as sombre as he could.

"I am?"

He lifted a pink sheet of paper and shook it at me.

"Do you recognize this?" he asked.

"No."

"This is a sexual-harassment complaint form."

"Yeah?"

"It names you on the complaint."

"I don't get it."

"Lana Donelli . . ." He went on to explain everything that I had been doing and feeling for the last week as if they were crimes. Going to Lana's desk, talking to her, leaving gifts. Even remarking on her clothes had been construed as if there was a sexual innuendo attached. By the time he was finished, I was worried that the police might be called in.

"Lana says that she's afraid to come in to work," Drew said, his freckles disappearing into angry lines around his eyes.

I wanted to say that I didn't mean to scare her, but I could see that my intentions didn't matter, that a small woman like Lana would be afraid of a big, sloppy mail clerk hovering over her and leaving notes and presents.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Sorry doesn't mean much when it's got to this point," he said. "If it was up to me, I'd send you home right now. But Mr. Averill says he wants to talk to you."

"Aren't you supposed to give me a warning?" I asked.

Drew twisted up his lips, as if he had tasted something so foul that he just had to spit it out. "You haven't been here a month. You're on probation."

"Oh," I said.

"Well?" he asked after a few moments.

"What?"

"Go back to the mail room and stay down there. Tell Ernie that I don't want you in the halls. You're supposed to meet Mr. Averill at one-forty-five, in his office. I've given him my recommendation to let you go. After something like this, there's really no place for you here. But he can still refer the matter to the police. Lana might want a restraining order."

I wanted to tell him that a restraining order was ridiculous. I wanted to go to Lana and tell her the same thing. I wanted to tell her that I bought her a rose because she wore rose toilet water, that I bought her the tree because the sun on her blotter could support a plant. I really liked her. But, even while I was imagining what I could say, I knew that it didn't matter.

"Well?" Drew said. "Go."

ERNIE made busywork for us that morning. He told me that he was upset about what had happened, that he'd told Drew to go easy.

"You know if you was white this wouldn't never have happened," Ernie said. "That girl just scared you some Mandingo gonna rape her. You know that's a shame."

I went up to the third floor a little before twelve. Lana was sitting at her desk, writing on a yellow legal pad. I walked right up to her and started talking so she couldn't ignore what I had to say.

"I just wanted to tell you that I'm sorry if you think I was harassing you. I didn't mean it, but I can see how you might have thought I was . . ."

Lana's face got hard.

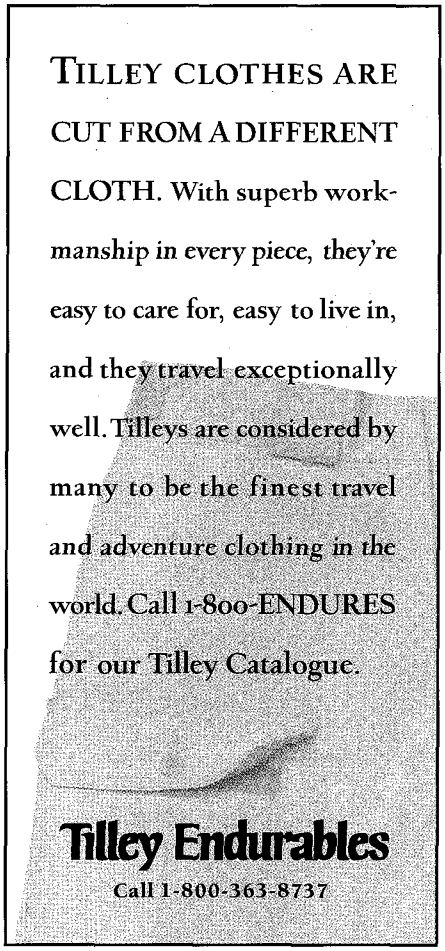
". . . but I'm gonna get fired right after lunch and I just wanted to ask you one thing."

She didn't say anything, so I said, "Is it because I'm black that you're so scared'a me?"

"You're black?" she said. "I thought you were Puerto Rican or Spanish or something. I didn't know you were black. My boyfriend is black. You just give me the creeps. That's why I complained. I didn't think they were going to fire you."

She didn't care if I lived or died. She wasn't even scared, just disgusted. I thought I was in love, and I was about to be fired, and she'd never even looked close enough to see me.

I was so embarrassed that I went



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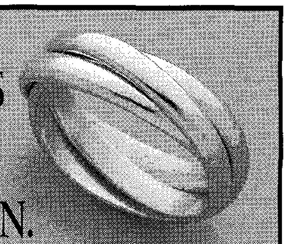

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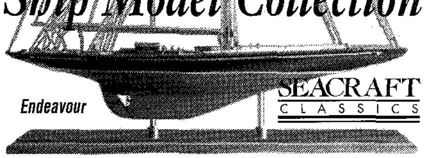

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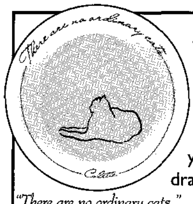

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away without saying another word. I went down to the mail room and sorted rubber bands until one-thirty-five.

Vice-president Bernard Averill's office was on the forty-eighth floor of the Carter's Home Building. His secretary's office was larger by far than Mr. Drew's cubbyhole. The smiling blonde led me into Averill's airy room. Behind him was a giant window looking out over Battery Park, Ellis Island, and the Statue of Liberty. I would have been impressed if I wasn't empty inside.

Averill was on the phone.

"Sorry, Nick," he said into the receiver. "My one-forty-five is here."

He stood up, tall and thin. His gray suit looked expensive. His white shirt was crisp and bright under a rainbow tie. His gray hair was combed back, and his mustache was sharp enough to cut bread, as my mother is known to say.

"Sit down, Mr. Coombs."

He sat also. In front of him were two sheets of paper. At his left hand was the pink harassment form, at his right was a white form. Outside, the Budweiser blimp hovered next to Lady Liberty.

Averill brought his fingertips to just under his nose and gazed at a spot above my head.

"How's Ernie?" he asked.

"He's good," I said. "He's a great boss."

"He's a good man. He likes you."

I didn't know what to say to that.

Averill looked down at his desk. "This does not compute."

"What?"

He patted the white page. "This says that you're a college graduate, magna cum laude in political science, that you came here to be a professional trainee." He patted the pink sheet. "This says that you're an interoffice-mail courier who harasses secretaries in the mortgage department."

Averill reached into his vest pocket and came out with an open package of cigarettes. At orientation they'd told us that there was absolutely no smoking anywhere in the building, but he took one out anyway. He lit up and took a deep drag, holding the smoke in his lungs for a long time before exhaling.

"Is there something wrong with you?" he asked.

"I don't think so," I said, swallowing hard.

Averill examined me through the tobacco haze. He seemed disgusted.

Staring directly into my eyes, he said, "Do you see this desk?"

The question petrified me, but I couldn't say why. Maybe it was the intensity of his gaze.

"I could call five or six women into this office right now and have them right here on this desk. Right here." He jabbed the desk with his middle finger.

My heart was racing. I had to open my mouth to get enough air.

"They're not going to fill out any pink slips," he said. "Do you know why?"

I shook my head.

"Because I'm a man. I don't go running around leaving chocolates on empty desks like bait. I don't fake reasons to come skulking around with newsletters."

Averill seemed angry as well as offended. I wondered if he knew Lana, or maybe her family. Maybe he wanted to fight me. I wanted to quit right then, to stand up and walk out before anything else happened. I was already thinking of where I could apply for another job when Averill sat back and smiled.

"Why are you in the interoffice mail room?" he asked, suddenly much friendlier.

"No P.T. positions were open when I applied," I said.

"Nonsense. We don't have a limit on P.T.s."

"But Ms. Worth said—"

"Oh." Averill held up his hand. "Reena. You know, Ernie helped me out when I got here, twenty-three years ago. I was just a little older than you. They didn't have the P.T. program back then, just a few guys like Ernie. He never even finished high school, but he showed me the ropes."

Averill drummed the fingers of his free hand between the two forms that represented me.

"I know this Lana's sister," he said. "Always wearing those cocktail dresses in to work. Her boss is afraid to say anything, otherwise he might get a pink slip, too." He paused to ponder some more. "How would you like to be a P.T. floater?"

"What's that?" I asked.

"Bumps you up to a grade seven and lets you move around in the different departments until you find a fit."

I was a grade B1.

"I thought you were going to fire me."

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"That's what Drew suggested, but Ernie says that it's just a mixup. What if I talked to Lana? What if I asked her to hold this back, to give you a second chance?"

"I'd like that," I said. "Thanks."

"Probably be better if I let Drew fire you, you know," he said, standing up. I stood, too. "I mean if you fuck up once you'll probably just do it again, right?"

He held out his hand.

Watching the forbidden smoke curl around his head, I imagined that Averill was some kind of devil. When I thanked him and shook his hand, something inside me wanted to scream.

I FOUND six unused crack vials a block from the subway stop near my apartment. I knew they were unused because they still had the little plastic stoppers in them.

When I got upstairs, I spent hours searching my place. I looked under the mattress and behind the toilet, under the radiator, and even down under the burners on the stove. Finally, after midnight, I decided to open the windows.

The fly had crawled down into the crack between the window frame and the sill in my bedroom. His green body had dried out, which made his eyes even bigger. He'd gone down there to die, or maybe, I thought, he was trying to get away from me. Maybe I had killed him. Later, I found out that flies have a very short life span. He probably died of old age.

I took his small, dried-out corpse and put it in one of the crack vials. I stoppered him in the tiny glass coffin and buried him among the roots of the bonsai crab apple.

"So you finally bought something nice for your house," my mother said after I told her about the changes in my life. "Maybe next you'll get a real bed." ◆

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THE CRITICS

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SHRINK TO FIT

A new biography puts Hillary Clinton on the couch.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Gail Sheehy, in "Hillary's Choice" (Random House; $23.95), examines the person she calls "one of the most remarkable women of our century" on two basic levels: the sartorial and the psychoanalytical. First things first. The child Hillary had not a clue how to dress. Often, she just gave up and went to school in her Girl Scout uniform. By the time she got to college, she had a "plumped bosom" and "womanly hips and thighs." (Sheehy is almost as interested in women's secondary sexual characteristics as in their clothes. Monica Lewinsky will appear in "a light green suit that looked deliciously shrunk over her ample curves.") But our First Lady-to-be hid those excellent attributes under "shapeless denim dresses." Nor did love change her habits. Why, when Bill Clinton took her to meet his mother—a woman frequently seen tooling off to the track with "her dangerously brown shoulders showing out of a tube top"—Hillary wore a mousy little head scarf and no makeup. As for her wedding dress, a "Jessica McClintock Victorian lace gown," she didn't buy it until the night before the wedding. That's how little she cared.

Things went on in this way ("sack-o'-seeds dresses," "fisherman's sweaters") until Bill Clinton was unseated as governor of Arkansas, in 1980. Then Hillary saw the light. She dyed her hair; she traded in her glasses for contacts; she "feigned an interest in fashion." And Bill was returned to office. Still, her sexual confidence wasn't much, nor—with his bimbo trail lengthening, and with her in the role of enforcer—was it getting any better. Her wardrobe tended toward the prim. The night Bill was elected President, she came out "uniformed in royal blue with black stockings." But the power of the Presidency bucked her up a bit. Soon we find her in a gold gown at the Grammy Awards and "very soignée in a bathrobe-tied black pantsuit and lilac turtleneck" for a speech, "Hard Choices," to a group of professional women. Some of her decisions were not quite on the money. When subpoenaed to explain her dealings at the Rose Law Firm to Kenneth Starr's grand jury, she turned up in "a thick black felt cloak with a sequined dragon on the back." This, Sheehy feels, may have given the Independent Counsel the wrong idea, but at least the spirit was right. And by the time of the second Inaugural she is telling the designer of her gown, "I want to look sexy for Bill."

A year into Bill's second term, the Monica story breaks, and this puts a crimp in the First Lady's fashion progress. She appears at an East Hampton fund-raiser "sober in a brown silk pantsuit and noticeably untanned." But the setback is only temporary. Soon she drops down in Puerto Rico "radiant in a white suit." Later, she turns heads at a governors' dinner in a "blue Bill Blass number with a thigh-high slit." And that's not to speak of the dress she wore to the N.E.A. awards dinner: "A plunging neckline revealed the First Bosom in a most flattering way."

What has happened to her? It seems that the shock of the Monica scandal has jolted Hillary out of her longtime role as Bill's eunuch. At the same time, she is entering upon a new life stage. (As no one needs to be told—more than five million copies in print—Sheehy is the author of "Passages," on the developmental stages of adult life.) The First Lady is on the threshold of the Flaming Fifties, and her previously damped-down sexuality is now unfolding. "For a brainy careerist—for any woman who has passed fifty—it is important to feel pretty and sexy." (Golda Meir? Margaret Thatcher?) "On election night, 1996, her young male press secretary, Neel Lattimore, had presented her with a 'Hillary Is a Babe' T-shirt. Then forty-eight, she loved being told 'You're hot, Hillary.' " "On her frequent trips to New York she conferred personally with haute couture master Oscar de la Renta and came under the tutelage of America's reigning fashion cop, *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour." "Christophe, the celebrity stylist," arranged for her to get her hair cut like Raquel Welch's. There may have been other interventions as well. At a Hillary speech on "mentoring," a member of the audience, who seems to have got tired of mentoring, commented to Sheehy that Hillary "doesn't have that fat ass or those piano legs anymore. I don't know if it's lipo, but she looks a lot better." She has bloomed at last.

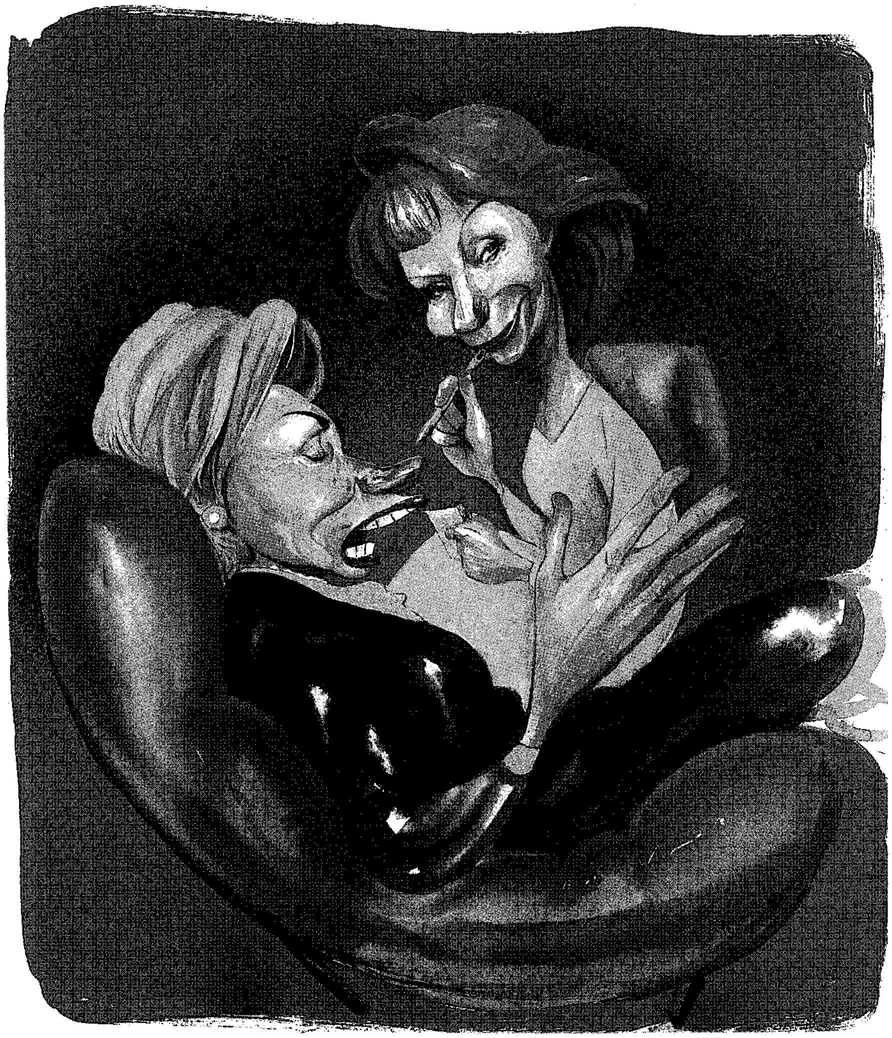
That's basically the story of the book: sexually unconfident girl marries sexmaniac guy; is rendered further sexually unsure by his sexual misdeeds; finds, upon his culminating sexual defection, that she is finally liberated—into sexuality. But Sheehy knows that she has to tell us more, tell us the reasons, and as the author of a long list of pop-psychology books—"Passages" was only the beginning—she stands ready. The Girl Scout uniform? Well, Hillary's father, Hugh Rodham, was a stern, upright, self-made man and, to the wonderment of Sheehy, who does not seem to have met any of the fathers of the fifties, he was not in the business of dispensing unconditional love. "*Toughen up* was the message" in that household. Hillary got straight A's; she didn't mess with boys. She also internalized her father's rule that "any emotional display signaled weakness." Thus she grew up to become a righteous, ambitious, drab little grind. Still her father withheld his approval.

Then *ka-boom!* She met Bill Clinton. Though we don't get the scene of his lifting off her glasses, the rest is all there:

> He was the wild card in her well-ordered cerebral existence. For her, head had always ruled over heart.... She had never let her emotions run away with her. Never.
>
> When Bill Clinton entered her world, he kicked over the applecart. Using his well-rehearsed powers of seduction, he introduced pleasure, surprise, spontaneity. For the first time, she was overwhelmed by something she couldn't explain, couldn't control. He found the passion beneath the prude.

But, as we know, her passion was not the only passion he wanted, and so the childhood drama was reprised. "Hungry for the affection and approval lacking from her father," she would achieve and achieve on Bill's behalf, but still he withheld his total commitment. "With the abysmal banality of neurotic patterns, Hillary seemed to be living out the same dynamic with her husband as with her father." She became "addicted" to Bill.

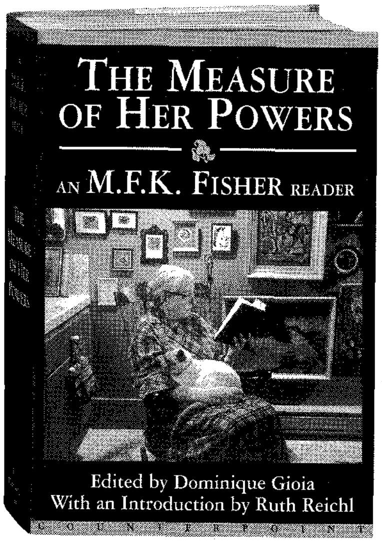
That's nothing compared with Bill's neuroses, though. This past summer, there was a rumor around town that in Lucinda Franks's profile of Hillary, in the first issue of *Talk*, we were going to get some major dirt on how the President was abused as a child. Then the issue came out, and spirits were damp indeed in my beauty parlor when all we were given was the same old stuff—alcoholic household, et cetera. No leering uncle, no lonely choirmaster. Sheehy, though she expands on the alcoholic household—we get Bill's mother and stepfather waving guns at each other—has also failed to come up with anything else, but this does not prevent her from using what she has in order to anatomize "the subtly layered psychological construct" that is our President's inner life. First, he has child-of-alcoholic-home syndrome: a compulsion to please, to placate. That explains why he's constantly telling people he feels their pain. Second, he's a "sex addict." Deprived of love, he sought consolation first in cookies, then in sex. He couldn't stop himself. And Hillary, always cleaning up after him, rescuing him from scandals, acted as his "enabler." But there's a deeper secret. The President, it seems, may have multiple-personality disorder, just like Dr. Jekyll. He commits his adulteries in an "altered state." That's why he lies so easily: in his mind, it was not he who chatted with the congressman over the phone while Monica, on her knees, was "pleasuring him." (Sheehy has an unwinning way with sex talk.) It was someone else.



A master of the pop-psychology genre, Gail Sheehy blithely reduces the First Lady's character to her supposed sexual insecurities and childhood conflicts.

STEVE BRODNER

Presumably, the reason Sheehy has based her portraits of the Clintons on their clothes and their putative psychodynamics is that she was unable to get any information from them directly. On the evidence of her footnotes, she hasn't had an interview with Hillary Clinton since 1992, a fact that is perhaps explained by a profile she published in *Vanity Fair* that year portraying the First Lady as an armor-plated control freak. The lack of firsthand testimony leaves a big, weird hole in the book, but my guess is that Hillary's silence was not inconvenient for Sheehy. That way, she could spin her own theories—indeed, her own facts—without any interference from the person under discussion. When Clinton was prevented by his record of philandering from running for President in 1988, Hillary's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feelings "were too chaotic to be allowed to surface." She also avoided "looking at her own role in perpetuating that behavior or the possibility that she was wanting in any way as a wife." How does Sheehy know? Apparently, she just knows.

What she doesn't know she gets others to tell her. The Clintons are notorious for shutting out friends and associates, and these people—David Gergen, Dick Morris, Betsey Wright (Bill's chief of staff in Arkansas)—have been happy to supply unflattering material. Even the undumped pitch in. The bandleader Peter Duchin, who played for a Clinton fund-raiser, offers his opinion on the Clintons' relationship: "I don't get that it's sexual." A former press aide also weighs in on this important matter: "The staff was always wondering, 'Do they do it? Only on her birthday?' " Right after the President's televised "apology" to the nation, in 1998, the Clinton family went on vacation to Martha's Vineyard. "On the helicopter ride to Andrews Air Force Base," we are told, "Hillary looked numb and Chelsea inconsolably sad." When I read this, I don't see Hillary and Chelsea. I see Gail Sheehy, buttonholing—who was it? a Secret Service man? the guy with the luggage?—and saying, "How did Hillary look? O.K., how about Chelsea?" This is a low-minded book.

But its worst sin is its pose of naïveté. Sheehy, who has built her journalistic career on psychological profiles, seems never to have met a human being. It is amazing to her that a man would commit adultery. And the President! In the White House! It bowls her over that an ambitious politician would avoid displays of introspection and self-criticism—would even *lie*. Strange, this did not surprise the public. Sheehy herself points out that, after the Monica story broke, the President's job approval rating rose to sixty-two per cent, far higher than his first-term average of forty-eight per cent. As for Hillary's sticking with this no-goodnik, two-thirds of the public said they admired her for it. That statistic must have surprised Sheehy, for the question of why Hillary stayed with Bill—why? why?—is the chief subject of her book. That is the "choice" referred to in the title. In fact, Hillary Clinton has made a number of important choices in her life. She has been the most politically potent First Lady since Eleanor Roosevelt—a major hand in public policy—and now she is running for the Senate. Soon people will have to decide whether to vote for her. But all this, for Sheehy, is secondary; the big question is the marriage. That is the "mystery" of Hillary. Hence the psychoanalysis. And don't think that Hillary and Bill are the only ones laid on the couch. Sheehy says that Chelsea was "variously reported"—this means what? by a variety of sources? none are cited—"as being hospitalized for mysterious stomach pains and causing Hillary concern that she might be developing an eating disorder." The Stanford Medical Center says it has seen neither hide nor hair of Chelsea. Nevertheless, to Sheehy the rumor portends "a cycle of revenge that was almost Oresteian in scope." A couple of blow jobs and we're in the House of Atreus.

Of course, Sheehy isn't really surprised by the goings on in the Clinton household. The psychological profiles she's been writing all these years are full of politicians and their faithful wives and stacked girlfriends. The shock, the "mystery," is a pretense, and a very popular one, shared, for example, by America's talk-show hosts. "How could you have done it?" they ask a carefully assembled group of people who have slept with their grandmothers or shot their dogs or worn women's panties in their hats. The miscreants explain how their families drove them to it. The audience reviles them and weeps for them. Then everyone goes home and has a good night's sleep. They got to dish the dirt, but not without the appearance of rectitude. They faced the ugliness of life, but they can explain it: family dysfunction. Thus is morality absorbed into psychology, prurience legitimatized by "understanding." At the end of Sheehy's book, Hillary appears, her neuroses burned away, giving a speech on human rights amid the ruins of Al-Badi Palace, in Morocco. "We can alter the direction of the planet," she proclaims, as she stands "swathed in a coppery sunset," presumably designed by Bill Blass. She is a "survivor," our favorite talk-show guest. The family, we are told, is considering psychological counselling. ♦

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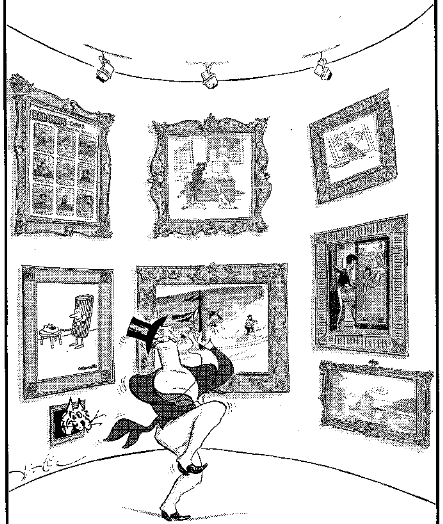

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BRIEFLY NOTED

PASSIONATE NOMAD, by Jane Fletcher Geniesse (Random House; $27.95). If you can imagine Indiana Jones as a small British woman, you have an idea of the dauntless travel writer Freya Stark (1893-1993), who spent much of her life exploring remote and perilous regions of the Middle East. She first escaped the influence of her domineering mother at the age of thirty-four, when she visited Lebanon and Syria; then, as in subsequent journeys, she was a risk-taker, travelling hard and mapping as she went. Stark rediscovered an Assassins' fortress in Persia and the lost Arabian port of Cana, wrote best-selling books, and was repeatedly honored by the Royal Geographic Society. She was less successful in her private life, however, and Geniesse helps us understand why a woman of genius was wildly unrealistic in her personal relations.

THE CODE BOOK, by Simon Singh (Doubleday; $24.95). In this entertaining survey, the evolution of cryptography is driven by the ongoing struggle between code-makers and code-breakers: each ingenious solution spurs a more sophisticated problem. Along the way, we encounter Charles Babbage, the nineteenth-century British polymath who conceived of a steam-powered computer; archeologists who used cryptographic methods to translate Egyptian hieroglyphics; and Navajo code-talkers employed by the U.S. military in the Second World War.

LETTERS OF THE CENTURY, edited by Lisa Grunwald and Stephen J. Adler (Dial; $35). A jumbo Christmas box of a book that contains four hundred and twelve letters arranged chronologically to demonstrate the effects of war, the Depression, demographic change, scientific innovation, medical discovery, and artistic experimentation on American life. It opens with a letter from the writer Joel Chandler Harris to his son in 1900, lamenting that "people no longer write letters," and closes with an on-line therapist in 1999 trying to disentangle a woman from an extramarital E-mail romance.

SILENT STARS, by Jeanine Basinger (Knopf; $35). While Chaplin, Gish, and Garbo are still remembered, many silent-era celebrities have faded from view. Here Basinger discovers a Mary Pickford who was more tomboy than golden girl; a Gloria Swanson with Chaplinesque physicality; and a Marion Davies who, contrary to the mythology of "Citizen Kane," was a talented actress held back by her relationship with William Randolph Hearst. Particularly enjoyable are accounts of such exotics as kohl-eyed Pola Negri, whose white Rolls-Royce was upholstered in white velvet, and the lovable German shepherd Rin-Tin-Tin, who kept Warner Bros. solvent through the twenties and finally died in the arms of Jean Harlow.

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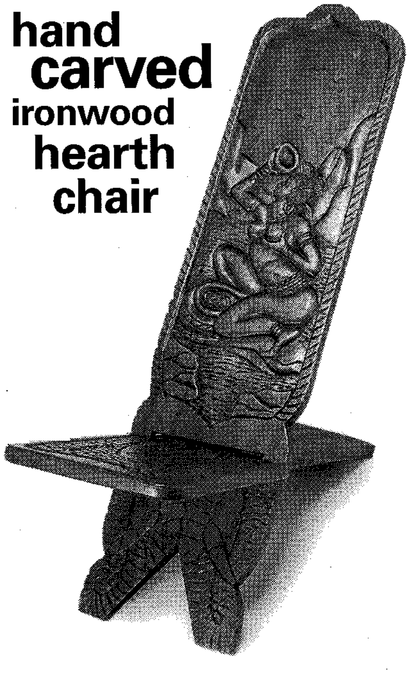

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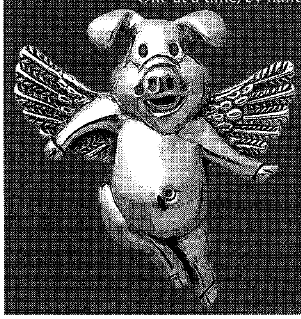

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE GIFT TO BE SIMPLE

Sorting out Aaron Copland on the centennial of his birth.

BY DAVID DENBY

AARON COPLAND got it right, back there in the late thirties. He got it right in a way that no one in serious American music but Charles Ives had ever done before and no one has ever done since. Copland, who was born at the beginning of the century, in 1900, and whose orchestral music the New York Philharmonic is now playing, almost in its entirety, turned himself into an American classic with just six works—the electrifying dance-hall romp "El Salón México"; the two cowboy ballets "Billy the Kid" and "Rodeo"; the symphonic landscape with words, "A Lincoln Portrait"; the exquisite "Appalachian Spring" ballet; and the grandiose Symphony No. 3, whose ambitious last movement begins with the brass-and-timpani episode known as "Fanfare for the Common Man." The "Fanfare" was a wartime effort—patriotic, ceremonial, a tribute to the ordinary soldiers who were fighting overseas. It was intended to bring a lump to the throat, and it still does, even on the thirtieth hearing. The piece has become as much an American signature as the faces on Mt. Rushmore: it is hauled out on Olympic and interplanetary occasions (the astronauts might never have left Earth without it); it has been pressed into service to sell bonds, to raise money for PBS, and to celebrate the building of the Brooklyn Bridge. Even rock bands have had their way with it. Yet, despite the media abuse, "Fanfare" has never become a joke. It remains stirringly solemn—three tremendous, slowly expanding arches of pure brass, with kettledrums in thundering but pointed response, all of it heroic but lonely and lean, in the spirit of a solitary seeker confronted by the promise of the new country. As the theme gets repeated, richer harmonies suggest the weight of experience after adversity, yet the intervals leap upward again in a renewal of strength. The two-minute work is square but not corny, rousing but not sentimental.

Copland, who died in 1990, wrote a great deal of music, some of it as spiky and forbidding as his famous pieces are exhilarating and easy to like. Always searching for the true American note—the essence of the country's spirit—he commanded the center of our musical culture, as composer, entrepreneur, and proselytizer, for something like four decades. The conductor Leonard Slatkin, who has recorded a great many of the composer's works, describes Copland as "the lens through which we saw the century's music." As a pioneer, Copland acted out the American artist's necessarily tangled relationship with Europe; he incorporated popular materials into high art forms as thoroughly as did Braque or Picasso; he bridged the gap between the concert hall and the movies and radio; and, along the way, he established what most people still think of as the very sound of American classical music. This new "American" sound was rangy, big-bodied, and clean-limbed—rarely sensuous. Its lyrical element emerged in the tender gravity of hymnal tunes. There are two inimitable Copland moods. One is a stomping, pounding exuberance in which, say, some threadbare cowboy song gets recharged with dance rhythms as complex and exciting as any that Stravinsky ever came up with; the other is elegiac and beautifully forlorn. His music, both rugged and touching, evokes the gathering strength of a newly powerful country—the open spaces and the metallic hardness of the industrial present—and also the isolation felt by people living on the plains or amid skyscrapers and empty streets.

Physically, Copland was a sort of Jewish Ichabod Crane—tall, gangly, careless about his clothes, with a face domi-

PHOTOGRAPH BY IRVING PENN

Copland in 1946: "When Aaron was present," a friend said, "everyone seemed safe, everything was all right, everyone soared above financial and emotional problems."

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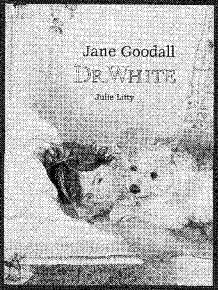

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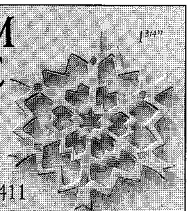

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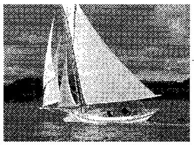

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nated by a large, curved beak, protruding teeth, and a receding chin. It was a face as homely, and as mesmerizingly photogenic, as that of Eleanor Roosevelt, with whom Copland shared certain qualities of resolve, independence, and decency. Here was a new kind of highbrow artist—an American artist, informal in style, practical and positive, a shrewdly sociable man making his way with good humor through the shallows of a country that was largely indifferent to art. The romantic image of the artist demands a certain fierceness; Copland simply persevered. But how much of what this even-keeled fellow composed has the strength of enduring art? We are still sorting it out.

COPLAND was born in Brooklyn, above a department store on Washington Avenue—a "drab" street, as he later recalled, with "none of the garish color of the ghetto, none of the charm of an old New England thoroughfare." The store's proprietors were his parents, Harris and Sarah Copland, who had emigrated from Lithuania in the decades after the Civil War. As a youngster, Aaron occasionally manned the cash register—an experience, he later said, that may have accounted for his practicality about money. Sarah Copland was introspective and quiet, passing on to her son a lifetime habit of reserve. His father, who was more opinionated and blustery, greeted the news of Aaron's musical interests with dismay, though his disapproval never reached the legendary depths of opposition expressed by Leonard Bernstein's dad. Copland grew up a self-reliant boy, silently homosexual, silently ambitious, picking up what he could of music from his older sister Laurine, who played the piano. He took his first formal music lessons as a teenager, and at the age of seventeen he became a student of Rubin Goldmark, the nephew of the Viennese composer Karl Goldmark and the sort of teacher, thoroughly trained in the German tradition, who flourished in America early in the century.

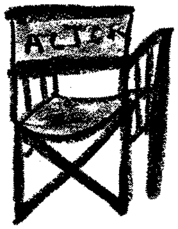
Copland, who never went to college, was a fast learner. At the age of nineteen, he wrote a short piano work, "Scherzo Humoristique: Le Chat et la Souris," a rippling piece of shenanigans in imitation-Debussy style which remains enormous fun. The same year—1920—he won a scholarship to a summer music school established for Americans by the French government outside Paris, at Fontainebleau. In the middle of the summer, he had a tremendous piece of luck: another student dragged him off to a harmony class taught by a young musical pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger. Nadia's younger sister, Lili, a talented composer, had died at twenty-four, and Nadia, who possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of music, from Gesualdo to the European avant-garde, had become fanatically dedicated to developing young composers. Copland became her eager protégé—one of the earliest in a long succession of American provincials who discovered their voices in her Paris apartment. As a composition teacher, Boulanger insisted on clarity, leanness, and forward movement—qualities exemplified by Les Six, the group of contemporary French composers whose leading figures were Darius Milhaud and Francis Poulenc. Their patron saint was the mockingly simple-sounding Erik Satie. Their god was Stravinsky.

It was in Europe that Copland—like his fellow-expatriates Hemingway and Cole Porter—discovered the cachet of being an American. "I thought a lot more about Brooklyn when I was in Paris than I ever did in Brooklyn," Copland later said. Hearing jazz in Vienna, he seemed to be hearing it for the first time. America itself, he realized, was a great subject for an artist, and in 1924, fully equipped, he went home.

THE opportunities for young composers were not exactly burgeoning in America. Apart from hymns, the Puritan settlers hadn't brought much music with them, and though concertgoing and operagoing had been established in some of the larger American cities by the mid-nineteenth century, serious composition did not flourish until the century's end. Most American composers studied in Europe and then returned home to recycle European styles, rather than create something vigorously American. Ives, of course, was the great exception. If his powerfully original, homegrown music hadn't remained unheard for so long, the "American sound" might have developed in quite a different way. Copland, who wasn't exposed to the older composer's work until 1929—and then only in a piecemeal fashion—returned home to a void, and proceeded to fill it.

American composers in the early twenties were, for the most part, solitary figures. Their works were rarely performed and barely paid for. There were few grants to help them—though wealthy patrons appeared now and then to throw a party or offer a commission, or even sponsor a concert series. Copland worked hard at his own music, but he also began taking steps to improve the dismal situation. Summing up his activities decades later, Virgil Thomson described an all-out strategic campaign that promoted not only new music but also Copland himself. Thomson noted that Copland, upon his return to New York, took over the direction of the League of Composers, a society formed to promote new work. At the same time, he made an alliance with Serge Koussevitzky, the newly appointed conductor of the Boston Symphony and a champion of contemporary music, who later gave the first performances of a number of Copland's works.

Thomson makes Copland sound like a real operator. Yet Copland's two-volume autobiography (a joint effort with the music historian Vivian Perlis) indicates that the young man's evolution into "the dean of American composers" came about through a series of spontaneous and often selfless acts. When Copland was still in his twenties—a time of necessary egocentricity for any artist—he aided fellow-composers again and again by giving a recommendation, providing criticism of a new score, or simply offering friendship. For years, he promoted the work of the testy and standoffish Roger Sessions, the openly anti-Semitic Carl Ruggles, and the waspish Thomson. (After accepting Copland's help, Thomson referred darkly to a "Jewish conspiracy" of which Copland, allegedly, was the head.) Copland was both insider and outsider, creator and mentor. Because of him, American composers got *paid.*



Copland's equanimity was extraordinary. When challenged on matters of principle, he stood firm, but, as Thomson noted, he never made unnecessary enemies. Thomson implies calculation, but this seems unfair in light of Copland's refusal to become offended over personal slights, to cultivate feuds, or to get angry over bad reviews. The art lecturer Rosamond Bernier, who was one of Copland's closest friends, recalls, "When Aaron was present, everyone seemed safe, everything was all right, everyone soared above financial and emotional problems."

Copland was not very forthcoming about his personal life. (He had the maddening habit of listening to gossip but not offering much of his own.) But one can surmise that, having grown up Jewish, homosexual, and homely, he realized early on that he was marked as an outsider and that he had to discipline himself to demand no more of the world than it would willingly give him. In the end, it gave him a great deal. This came about, in part, because the simplicity of his personal needs inspired such wide respect. Throughout his life, he avoided regular employment in a conservatory or university, getting by (until he was nearly fifty) on a few thousand dollars a year gleaned from his compositions, his writing, and his occasional teaching jobs. Now and then, his income was augmented by high-paying work for Hollywood, but for decades he lived deep within the musical establishment as a twenties bohemian, camping out in cheap hotel rooms, modest apartments, and sparsely furnished lofts.

Copland was no saint. Exercising the privileges of a successful artist, he had affairs with men who were much younger than he and who became, in many cases, his secretaries and travelling companions, his students and spiritual disciples. The longest lasting of these relationships were with Victor Kraft, a photographer, and the dancer Erik Johns, who later wrote the libretto for Copland's opera "The Tender Land." His most famous acolyte, Leonard Bernstein, was enormously indebted to him—"Fancy Free," "On the Town," "West Side Story," and the film score for "On the Waterfront" would not have been possible without Copland's influence—and Bernstein probably did more to popularize Copland's music than anyone else. They met in 1937 at a dance recital in New York, and afterward, in Copland's loft, the nineteen-year-old Harvard junior, on a dare from the composer, tore through Copland's difficult "Piano Vari-

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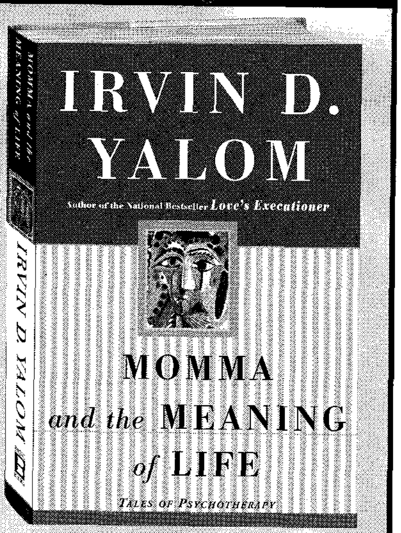
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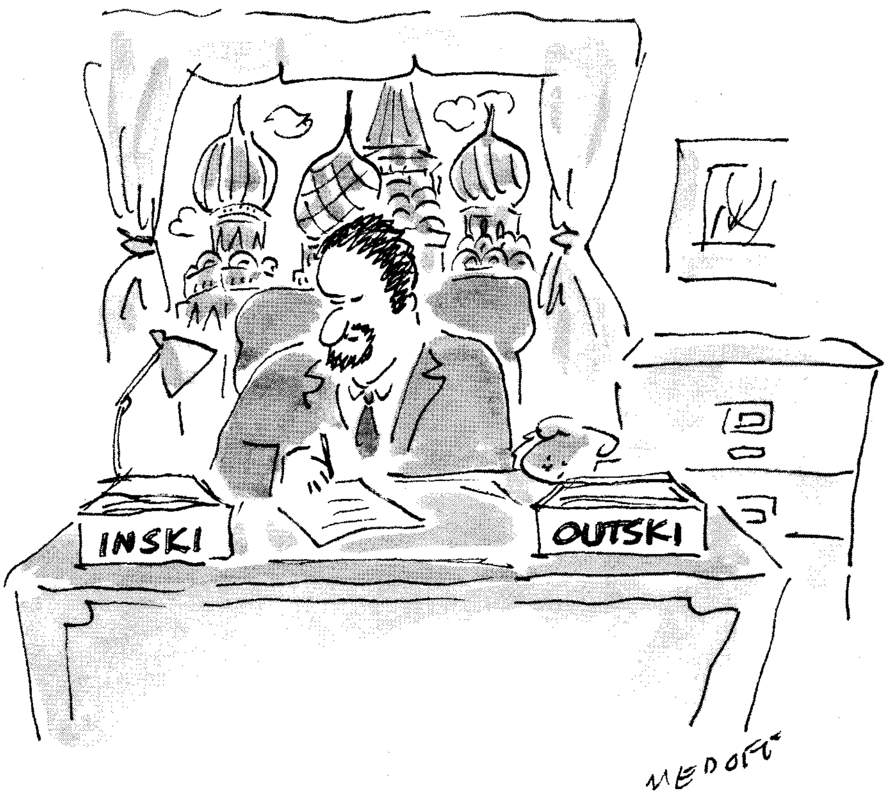

ations" and astonished the room. According to Copland's most recent biographer, Howard Pollack, whose "Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man," published earlier this year, is the most thorough book to date about the composer, the two men appear to have had an affair in the early nineteen-forties. Bernstein, who loved luxury, was nonplussed by Copland's austerity. "Can you imagine Aaron wearing a ring, a jewelled cufflink?" he said to Vivian Perlis years later. "Plain, plain, plain! . . . He wasn't miserly, just pinchpenny. It was part of his plainness, it was part of thrift. One of those Puritan virtues, like being fair—you're thrifty."

BERNSTEIN traced the exquisite simplicity of Copland's best works, including "Appalachian Spring," to the older man's temperament, but the spirit of plainness is everywhere in his music. Copland's early pieces, written in the twenties and early thirties, came in two styles, jazzy and, as he called them, "severe"; that is, dissonant, harsh, abstract. The jazzy pieces have held up better—in fact, superbly. (Virgil Thomson quipped that jazz was Copland's "one wild oat.") Copland, however, did not write *jazz;* he thought of jazz as a natural musical speech for Americans—"the substance not only of the American composer's foxtrots and Charlestons, but of his lullabies and nocturnes"—and he incorporated its rhythms and its transparencies into classical forms. In the wonderful 1925 piece for small orchestra, "Music for the Theatre," a sizzling solo trumpet fanfare in mock-military style leads into one of Copland's gravely nocturnal melodies for strings—and then suddenly, without warning, the music leaps into a rapid dance, with a staccato, almost percusssive, use of strings and piano. Has there ever been American classical music this loose and funny? "Music for the Theatre" deserves to be more popular than it is; the piece is as redolent of the twenties as Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," and it shows a more delicate workmanship than Gershwin was capable of.

The Piano Concerto, which was composed in 1926, is a grander jazzy piece, with an expansively heroic beginning and romantic gestures of horizon-widening power and extension. The piano, when it enters, is at first strangely solitary and plunking—it offers a scatter shot of notes, in bluesy style. But in the second movement it takes off in a clangorous, syncopated honky-tonk, and the whole orchestra runs after it in an exultant polyrhythmic stomp, pounding away. The piece—an American war whoop—was hissed by the audience at a performance in the Hollywood Bowl. Copland the avant-gardist had arrived.

Copland's jazz-influenced scores are terrific young-man's music. But when he tried to write mature-sounding orchestral music in his "severe" style—in the Symphonic Ode (1929), the neoclassical Short Symphony (1933), and the Statements (1935)—the results were problematic. The most imposing of them, the Ode, has slablike, brass-heavy masses of tone and furious, perpetual-motion passages. The conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, a defender of the score, calls the slabs "Mahlerian," and finds in its driven passages intimations of contemporary minimalism. To my ears, these pieces come off as willed and monochromatic—impressive but emotionally impacted. In the Ode, Copland's anti-Romanticism, which was influenced, perhaps, by Stravinsky's ethos of impersonality, leads him to cut off some beautiful melodic ideas just when they are about to bloom.

Listening to early Copland, one realizes that his famous leanness was the product not only of temperament and training but of his having grown up in a traditionless country. It is the central problem for any American composer, and it's part of what makes Copland, in his occasional failures as well as in his successes, so moving a figure. As an American, he had no ready, flowing stylistic undertow to give way to or to resist—nothing comparable to Stravinsky's stripped-down pictorialism, derived from Rimsky-Korsakov, or Britten's long tradition of English church music. The atonal adventures of Schoenberg and his two great disciples, Berg and Webern, emerged directly from three hundred years of harmonic expansion in European music. But an American composer is forced to say, "What is our idiom? What is the fundamental American quality?" Charles Ives tried to get everything into his music: transcendentalism, village bands, even Brahms. Copland, on the other hand, looked for essences: he edited out. He felt that a piece must be made from the ground up—it must immediately define a style. But, with so little behind him, Copland had, so to speak, to compose each note fresh. Since he was not timid, his ideas are sometimes painfully exposed, and when they are banal or undeveloped you hear it immediately.

Pollack, in his biography, reveals that Copland worked on his pieces in sections but not necessarily in sequence; he might, for instance, write the end of the piece before the middle. The finished "severe" pieces, which are harmonically static for long stretches, certainly fall into parts, without much sense of an ongoing narrative form. For instance, Copland's major work for solo piano, the Piano Variations (1930), a milestone for many American composers and musicians, can be hellish for mere pleasure-seeking music lovers to sit through. It has the mad insistence of what Tilson Thomas calls Copland's "young man attacks piano" style. Copland returns again and again to the same spare, bone-hard theme, sticking it to us, and except for one brief, thrilling passage, when the music breaks into gleeful syncopations, the piece, for all its aggressiveness, never builds much momentum or cumulative power.

COPLAND never apologized for his abstract pieces, and the Philharmonic, in its current festival, is playing a lot of them. In his autobiography, however, he notes that at some time in the mid-thirties he began to feel a chill. He grew tired of seeing the same old faces at concerts of new music. He wanted a larger audience. He enjoyed conducting semi-trained musicians, both here and in South America, where he travelled frequently, and he wrote a children's opera, "The Second Hurricane," which was first staged, in 1937, by the twenty-one-year-old Orson Welles, in New York. How do you create an audience for new American music? Copland's solution was almost comically pragmatic: you write music for kids to play. An Outdoor Overture, for school orchestras, followed in 1938.

The temper of the times was also propelling him in a more populist direction. In both democratic and authoritarian countries, artists were under pressure to provide intelligible work for a large audience. After word got out

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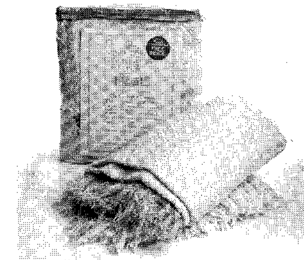
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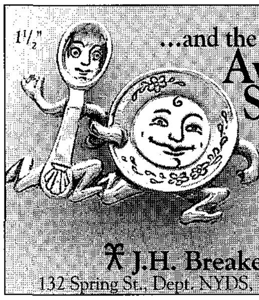

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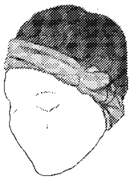
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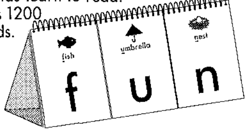

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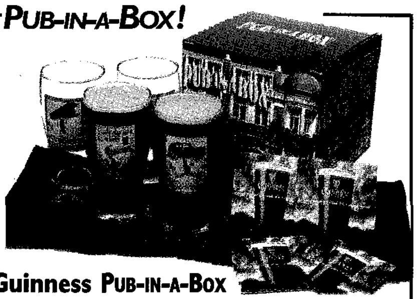

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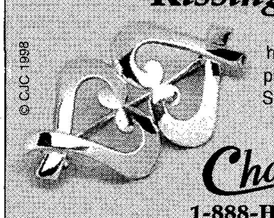

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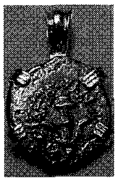

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that Stalin liked Russian folk music, the American left took up the native varieties with a vengeance. In the mid-nineteen-thirties, Copland, a life-long liberal with socialist leanings, contributed to a couple of workers' songbooks, and he even perpetrated a song called "Into the Streets May First," which was published in *New Masses*. Copland never joined the Communist Party, but he had been more than aroused to the possibility of using popular music in his work.

In 1936, inspired by the sweaty sensuality of a dance hall he had enjoyed in Mexico City, he reached into Mexican songbooks for tunes like "El Mosquito" and produced the first of his popular pieces, the convulsive "El Salón México." The three famous ballets that followed also fused artistic knowingness with commonplace materials. "Billy the Kid" came to life because Lincoln Kirstein, then the director of Ballet Caravan, wanted American-themed work that would be more immediate than classical ballets. In 1938, Kirstein persuaded the choreographer and dancer Eugene Loring to devise a scenario based on the legend of the outlaw William Bonney, and he deposited in the hands of a dubious Copland a couple of collections of cowboy songs. Copland dutifully took them on a trip to Paris, only to discover, on the Rue de Rennes, that they seemed much more fertile than they had in New York. The aesthetic he had learned from Boulanger and Stravinsky—the clear, hard-edged textures, the liberated rhythms—could be applied to this naïve stuff. Its goofy and earnest Americanness leaped out at him. The same thing happened a few years later with a second cowboy ballet, "Rodeo," which grew out of such lame dance-hall songs as "If He'd Be a Buckaroo" and "Tip Toe, Pretty Betty Martin." For "Appalachian Spring," Martha Graham initially wanted Copland to collaborate on a "bitter, sardonic, murderous, despairing" work based on the Medea story. But Graham abandoned tragedy and came up with something more modest: a dance about the beginnings of a marriage, and the raising of a new house, in mid-nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. Copland, now thoroughly sold on folk materials, made shining use of the Shaker song "Simple Gifts" ("'Tis the Gift to Be Simple"), even though there are more Quakers than Shakers in Pennsylvania.

Copland's success in recasting folklore with modernism's tools earned him the insult, in certain circles, of "selling out." But, revisited today, the Copland ballets are among the few works produced by the populist spirit of the thirties that retain their power as serious art. The brilliance of the scores is evident at once—the rhythmic vitality and originality; the clarity of the orchestration, which is as crisp and "readable" as a Walker Evans photograph; the restrained but eloquent sentiment. Having long taken Copland's ballet music for granted, I was amazed, in listening to it again, by how exquisitely worked it is—in the use of silence and anticipatory hushed moods, in the sense of space and landscape, in the gentleness of the melodic gestures and the transitional shadings between the hoedown and gunfighting uproars. Copland's use of folk tunes liberated his sense of fun and brightened his instrumental colors. The ballets also brought out a homely-beautiful soulfulness that had been missing in his earlier work. Before Copland, Virgil Thomson had made cogent use of American folk music, and Ferde Grofé and Morton Gould would do so after him. But in Copland's hands the material sounds not like "Americana" but like primal motifs, lifted from the earth and given a spiritual dimension. Writing in wartime, Copland wanted to create a language that would unite all Americans; he did so without stooping to propaganda. Darius Milhaud was not the only one to hear in the ballets "a tremendous sadness, an underlying distress."

No inner demon was driving Copland to compose. He did much of his work on commission, producing, at Benny Goodman's request, a lovely Clarinet Concerto (1948) with a sensational cadenza—one of his most enduring pieces. He took work in the movies because he needed money and enjoyed composing for a guaranteed audience. His tastes drew him to safe literary projects—adaptations of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" and "The Red Pony," Henry James's "Washington Square," which became "The Heiress"—rather than to more provocative material, but his movie music, modest and beautifully crafted, is some of his loveliest work, and a considerable break with Hollywood practice. Copland discarded the overripe, down-from-Vienna style of such sophisticated movie composers as Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Max Steiner. He thought that background music should be used only sparingly; in his score for "The Heiress," whole scenes go by without a note, and what's there is almost shy. He respected the members of the audience too much to allow the music to do their feeling for them.

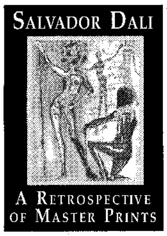
AFTER the war, Copland's renown grew enormously. He had made an uncertain beginning as a conductor (he used to pester Bernstein for help), but he eventually became quite adept, and he enjoyed conducting so much that he favored even provincial American orchestras with his presence. He listened intently to the work of the European avant-garde, and he became a kind of apostle to the Americas, travelling repeatedly to Latin America, and then teaching its best young composers at Tanglewood. But a curious fate had overtaken him. Ned Rorem has pointed out that as Copland's fame increased, his influence waned. By the sixties, critics and musicians were using such words as "Moses" and "patriarch" to describe him. No man was less inclined to lay down the law, but his shoulders were beginning to stoop from the honors draped on them.

In the twenties, Copland, despite his admiration for Schoenberg, had rejected atonality as a kind of German scholasticism. But after the Second World War the serial orthodoxies of Schoenberg and his followers took hold in American universities, and Copland suddenly appeared old hat. Copland, who embraced serialism as early as 1950, in the Piano Quartet, denied that he was jumping on any bandwagon, but, still, some of his last major compositions can be seen as an attempt to catch up and regain influence. In a curious way, Europe reclaimed him.

At the opening of Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall, in 1962, a gala audience was stunned into near silence by the work he composed for the occasion. Far from being celebratory, "Connotations" opened with shrieking brass chords that were murder to listen to in the acoustically unfriendly setting—and then proceeded with grim insistence through many pages of abrasive variations. ("Oh, Mr. Copland . . ." was all that Jacqueline Kennedy could say to the composer afterward.) Copland said that the piece evoked "the tensions, aspirations, and drama inherent in the world of today." Only on a fourth or fifth hearing do some of its "tensions" come to seem harshly beautiful. The similarly atonal "Inscape," which came five years later, is a better piece, with delicate writing for winds and strings. As time passes, these two gargoyles have become less menacing, but they are not quite pleasurable, and perhaps they never will be. Copland wrote thorny music throughout his life, and it would be a fallacy to say that his "easy" pieces are true to his nature and his "difficult" ones foreign to it. Still, in his short opera "The Tender Land" Copland sounds like a man who loves to make music; in "Connotations" he sounds like a man who has forgotten the gift of American informality and swallowed the modernist notion that a piece must sound difficult to be considered great.

COPLAND disdained the sort of self-labelling—as Jew or homosexual or concerned citizen—that, in recent decades, has hampered as many artists as it has liberated. The blanket identity of "American" was good enough for him. He was the high-art equivalent of the Eastern European fur salesmen and glove manufacturers who invented Hollywood and who flourished by giving back to the country an image of its possibilities that everyone could accept. He was limited, however, by the pioneer's handicap. Trying to embrace everything native, he quickly exhausted various idioms, and then moved on. At times, he seemed to mistrust his greatest talents. One need not believe, as I do, that his most popular work is his best work to be surprised that he did not write more generously melodic pieces like "Billy the Kid."

In all, Copland is a near-great composer—as Bernstein said, "the best we've got." No American composer can launch a career without hearing Copland's music in his head and drawing on it as a resource to embrace, reject, or overcome. Because of Copland, we are no longer bare; we now have a tradition, and he, more than anyone else, created it. At



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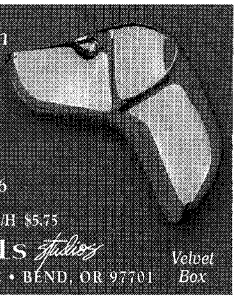

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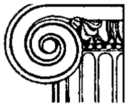

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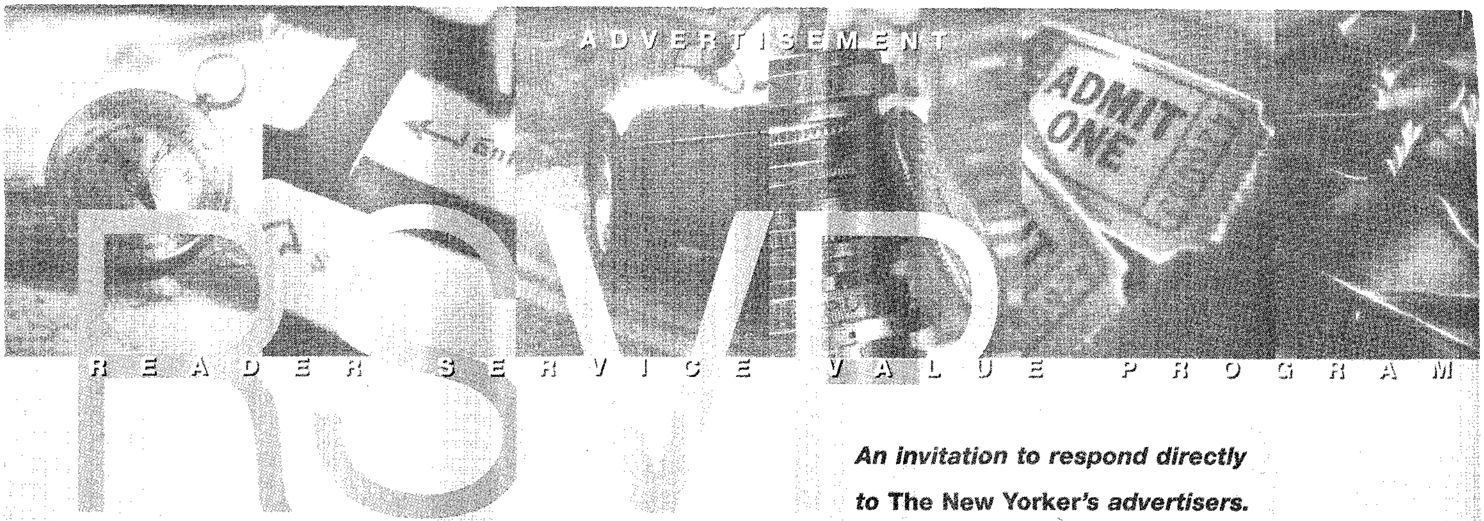

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For more information, log on to www.newyorkerreaderlink.com the Philharmonic concert that I attended, there was an air of celebration in the hall. The program began with the Symphonic Ode and closed with "Rodeo." Big-sounding, fresh, and vibrant, the music sprang off the stage. There were a lot of young people in the hall, informally dressed and exuberant—a fervent new audience for serious American music. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

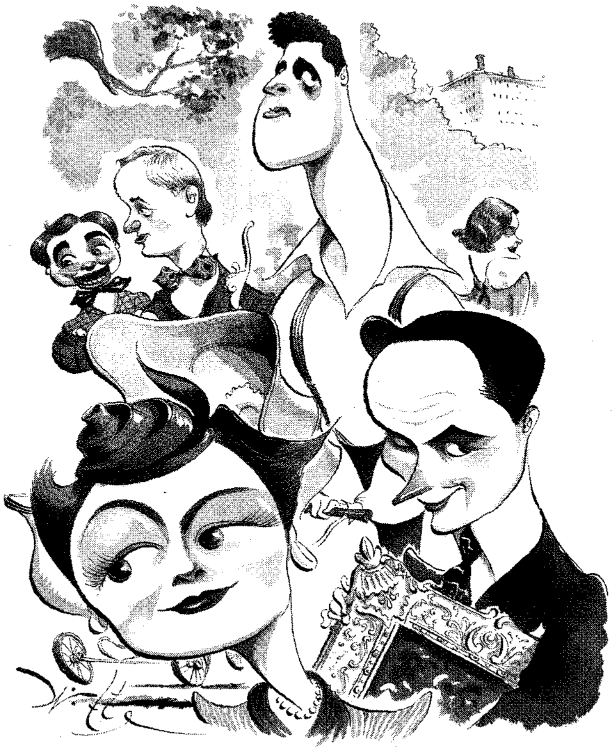
STAGESTRUCK

Thirties idealism with a sense of humor, and "The Cider House Rules."

BY ANTHONY LANE

It was clever of Tim Robbins to make "Cradle Will Rock," and dumb of everyone else not to have made it before. What a load of stuff this movie packs: You want New York in the nineteen-thirties? You got it. You want the rocketing rise of Orson Welles? No problem. You want art for the masses, dinner for three, Commies, anti-Commies, William Randolph Hearst, and singing stagehands? All yours. Lord knows what the whole bundle adds up to, though a clue may lie in the plaintive line of the reactionary Tommy Crickshaw (Bill Murray): "Reds aren't funny," he says, and I suspect that Robbins, as both writer and director, takes that as a provocation. Like Warren Beatty, he knows that the left, whether it comes in Uncle Joe Red or Beverly Hills pink, must forever wrestle with the charge of solemnity. It's much easier to change the world with a straight face; the right—the old, respectable right, that is, not the pop-eyed right of recent years—has always preferred to pour itself a drink and smile on the world as it happens so regrettably to be.

"Cradle Will Rock" takes its title from the musical play that was staged on June 16, 1937, at the Venice Theatre on Seventh Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street. That was the idea; in the event, it was barely a play, and not so much staged as shouted out. Written and composed by Marc Blitzstein (Hank Azaria), "Cradle" threw a punch, and a timely one: it hauled the lurching, demotic rhythms of, say, "The Beggar's Opera" into the age not only of jazz but of perspiring civil unrest. It dramatized the workers' right to strike just as real strikes were testing the mettle of the steel bosses; if Welles warmed to the Blitzstein project, he was fired less by political sympathy, perhaps, than by the undying Wellesian wish to start a stir. When it turned out that



Creating a theatrical stir in the age of jazz and civil unrest: Sarandon and Cusack in "Cradle Will Rock."

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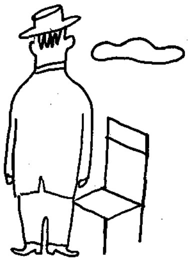
funding for the Federal Theatre Project (which was backing "Cradle") had been sliced at the root, and that the United States military was being posted at the theatre doors in order to block the première, Welles was in very heaven. He and the company marched uptown to the Venice, and the rest is history.

For some, it will be buried history, and I leave the finale to their imaginations. This is "a mostly true story," we are informed at the start, and Robbins has taken great pains with his liberties. It is true that Nelson Rockefeller (John Cusack) hired Diego Rivera (Ruben Blades) to paint a mural in the lobby of Rockefeller Center; whether the millionaire's gaze slid helplessly sidewise, however, toward the full-bosomed models who lounged in Rivera's studio, and whether they subsequently lured him into quite so drunken a dance, is a matter more of embroidery than of official record. But it feels funny and right: Cusack flickers with the authentic nervousness of money gathering art into its embrace—praying that paint can be bought like oil or steel, and fearful of a possible brushoff. Robbins is strong on the comic mismatches of thirties culture: Countess La Grange (Vanessa Redgrave), a moneyed patroness, whispering hasty details of the "Cradle" lockout to Aldo Silvano (John Turturro), a dirt-poor member of the cast; or Margherita Sarfatti (Susan Sarandon), a Jewish beauty who works for Mussolini, beseeching the Marxist Rivera, perched before his mural, to "cheer it up a little" for her new friend Nelson.



In the middle of this you find the oddest couple of all: John Houseman (Cary Elwes) and Orson Welles (Angus Macfadyen). These were the days just before they founded the Mercury Theatre—the days of the all-black "Macbeth" in Harlem and the necromantic "Dr. Faustus." You may feel shortchanged by the likenesses here; Macfadyen's first appearance is all cape-swirling bluster, and Elwes lifts up his chin in queeny disdain. Where is Welles the seductive crooner? Where is Houseman the great organizer, who kept his steam-powered friend on the rails? I wonder whether this shrinkage is a deliberate policy on Robbins's part—whether, for the first time, a fellow-creator has dared to introduce Orson Welles and then forbidden him to hog the stage. We take it as read that Welles was a centripetal monster, sucking the rest of the world into his maw; here, for once, we sense him being hustled along by forces of circumstance that even he could not command. The most heartfelt homage that "Cradle Will Rock" can pay to the socialist surge of the thirties lies in the democratic spread of its attention: all, even the left-baiters, must have a voice.

Not everything comes off. Bill Murray, as a lonely ventriloquist, has too lean a gag to run with, and there are times when Olive Stanton (Emily Watson), a hungry wanna-be, sounds more like a character in a cobwebbed play—"I'm just a girl who needs a break is all." For the most part, though, Robbins is master of all he surveys; needing to fill out the historical background, he starts with a newsreel about Hitler and F.D.R., but soon diverts our attention behind the screen to the figure of Olive, who has sneaked into the movie theatre and fallen asleep on a pile of plush curtains. As if to scotch any fears that a film about a play might stiffen with theatricality, Robbins has a travelling camera snake ahead of the actors as they bustle through dressing rooms and corridors, and he conjures devices that a stage manager could only dream of: we swoop without a cut from Blitzstein's hands, busy at the keyboard, to a scene of mounted cops and union men at war in the Park. You can almost hear the cry: "Shoot me, I'm the piano player!"

For all his nimbleness, there is something old-fashioned in the tribute that Robbins pays to the lost ideal of art as catalytic comment. The final shot of the film—a knowing gaze at the Times Square of today, starbright with everything except a decent play—reminds us that, when it comes to the keeping of the cultural flame, the liberal can be just as much the disappointed romantic as his conservative foe. Hence, perhaps, the lack of a villain in this picture—someone like the Eugene O'Neill that Jack Nicholson delivered in "Reds," someone who chafes at the vaunting eagerness of the surrounding figures. Everyone here is alive to their obligations and their furies; Robbins wouldn't have it any other way, and that is why he lavishes such care on Hallie Flanagan (Cherry Jones). Flanagan, the presiding genius of the Federal Theatre, was a force of nature, and Jones, with that wonderful wide smile—half

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college professor, half minx—and those tidy tailored suits, outshines even the memory of Orson Welles, and convinces us that it was bliss in that dawn to be alive. Here, in this dusk, with the cradle long fallen from its bough, we are lucky that Tim Robbins and company have mustered to tell the tale.

IF a film begins with Michael Caine attempting an American accent, what are the chances of recovery? "The Cider House Rules" is adapted by John Irving from his own novel, and he's done a neat filleting job—almost too neat, so that some passages crawl and creak for want of activity. The movie starts at an orphanage—a blatant Dickensian device, though even Dickens might have balked at the spotless love that is bestowed by Caine, as Dr. Larch, upon his charges, one of whom wheezes through enfeebled lungs. Only Irving would dare to play the Tiny Tim card without a blush, and it's to the credit of the director, Lasse Hallström, who proved his credentials as a child-wrangler with "My Life as a Dog" and "What's Eating Gilbert Grape?," that the movie doesn't expire from sentimental excess.

Tobey Maguire plays Homer Wells, a long-term inmate of the orphanage—one of Larch's "princes of Maine." One fine day, in the middle of the Second World War, Homer sets off to see the world, in the company of Candy (Charlize Theron) and her boyfriend, Wally (Paul Rudd). They get as far as the coast, where Homer learns to harvest apples—no fool he—and to trap lobsters. When Wally is posted overseas, leaving Candy behind, Homer steps in to fill the breach. Ever resourceful, he also sorts out a bad case of incest among his fellow fruit pickers. All this bears the charm of inconsequence; Hallström has a keen eye for the happily adrift—for Homer and Candy sitting at a vacant drive-in, closed for the war. But, as a meditation on growing up, "The Cider House Rules" loses its grip, and the performances that grab you are the adult ones; Delroy Lindo's grim turn as an abusive father mocks the sweetness that dogs the rest of the tale. Still, there is something here to lift the heart of a film buff: the orphans are given a regular screening of "King Kong" and nothing else, so when Homer finally sees another movie—"Wuthering Heights"—he is unimpressed. "It's no 'King Kong,'" he says. But then, what is? ♦

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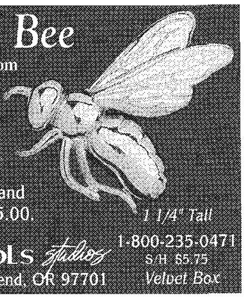

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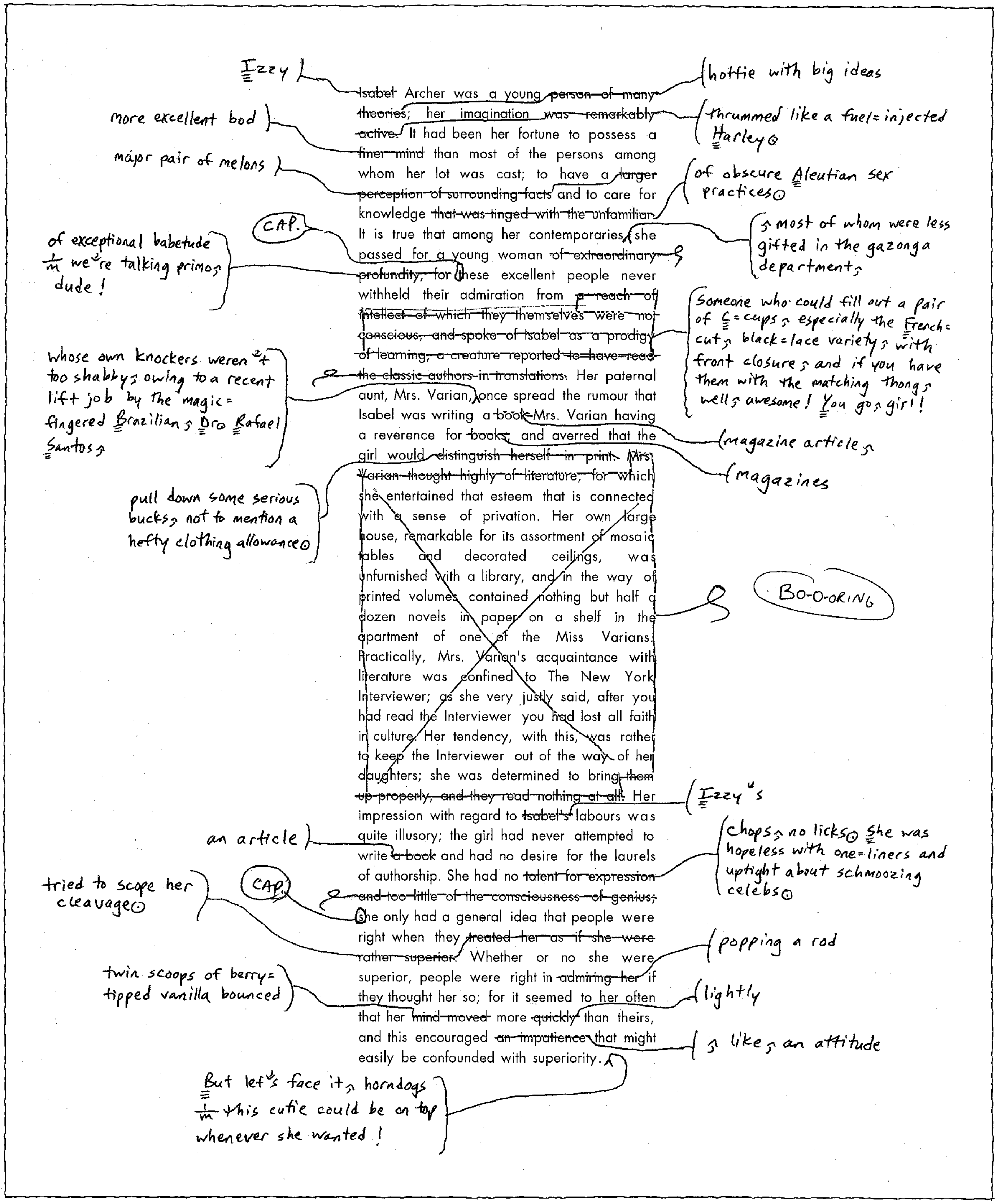
THE BACK PAGE BY CHARLES McGRATH

THE DETAILS MAGAZINE EDITING TEST

"It took almost three months, but [Details] editor Mark Golin has finally repopulated the Details senior staff. . . . Both [successful candidates] passed a rigorous editing test Mr. Golin sent out to the 30 or so applicants for the jobs."—The New York Observer, November 22, 1999.



~~Isabel~~ Archer was a young ~~person of many theories~~; her imagination ~~was remarkably active.~~ It had been her fortune to possess a ~~finer mind~~ than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast; to have a ~~larger perception of surrounding facts~~ and to care for knowledge ~~that was tinged with the unfamiliar.~~ It is true that among her contemporaries she passed for a young woman ~~of extraordinary profundity; for~~ these excellent people never withheld their admiration from ~~a reach of intellect of which they themselves were not conscious, and spoke of Isabel as a prodigy of learning, a creature reported to have read the classic authors in translations.~~ Her paternal aunt, Mrs. Varian, once spread the rumour that Isabel was writing a ~~book~~—Mrs. Varian having a reverence for ~~books~~, and averred that the girl would ~~distinguish herself in print. Mrs. Varian thought highly of literature, for which she entertained that esteem that is connected with a sense of privation. Her own large house, remarkable for its assortment of mosaic tables and decorated ceilings, was unfurnished with a library, and in the way of printed volumes contained nothing but half a dozen novels in paper on a shelf in the apartment of one of the Miss Varians. Practically, Mrs. Varian's acquaintance with literature was confined to The New York Interviewer; as she very justly said, after you had read the Interviewer you had lost all faith in culture. Her tendency, with this, was rather to keep the Interviewer out of the way of her daughters; she was determined to bring them up properly, and they read nothing at all.~~ Her impression with regard to ~~Isabel's~~ labours was quite illusory; the girl had never attempted to write ~~a book~~ and had no desire for the laurels of authorship. She had no ~~talent for expression and too little of the consciousness of genius;~~ she only had a general idea that people were right when they ~~treated her as if she were rather superior.~~ Whether or no she were superior, people were right in ~~admiring her~~ if they thought her so; for it seemed to her often that her ~~mind moved~~ more ~~quickly~~ than theirs, and this encouraged ~~an impatience~~ that might easily be confounded with superiority.

Izzy

hottie with big ideas

more excellent bod

thrummed like a fuel-injected Harley.

major pair of melons

of obscure Aleutian sex practices.

CAP.

, most of whom were less gifted in the gazonga department,

of exceptional babetude — we're talking primo, dude!

Someone who could fill out a pair of C-cups, especially the French-cut, black-lace variety, with front closure, and if you have them with the matching thong, well, awesome! You go, girl!

whose own knockers weren't too shabby, owing to a recent lift job by the magic-fingered Brazilian, Dr. Rafael Santos,

magazine article,

magazines

pull down some serious bucks, not to mention a hefty clothing allowance.

BO-O-ORING

Izzy's

an article

chops, no licks. She was hopeless with one-liners and uptight about schmoozing celebs.

tried to scope her cleavage.

CAP.

popping a rod

twin scoops of berry-tipped vanilla bounced

lightly

, like, an attitude

But let's face it, horndogs — this cutie could be on top whenever she wanted!

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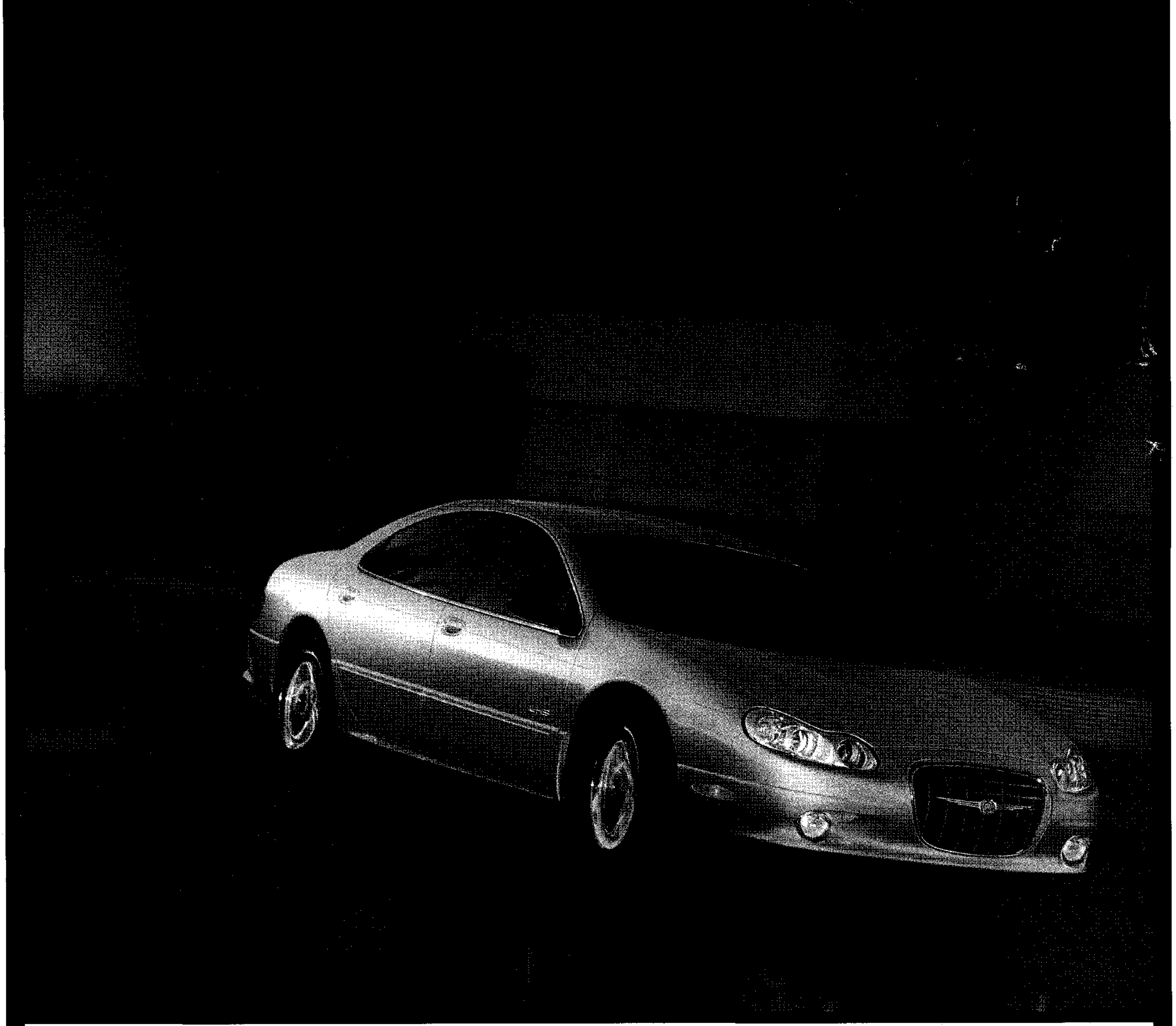

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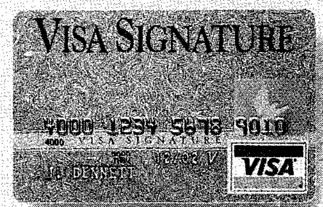
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